Susan Dunn: Revolutionary Legacies

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SUSAN DUNN's *Sister Revolutions* is forthcoming from Farrar, Straus & Giroux. . . .*The Name*, **MICHAL GOVRIN**'s most recent novel, was translated by **BARBARA HARSHAV** and published by Riverhead Books. . . .**MARK HARMAN**'s translation of Franz Kafka's *The Castle* (Schocken Books) was selected as one of the best fiction books of 1998 by the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*. . . .**SETH FORMAN**, the author of *Blacks in the Jewish Mind* (NYU Press), teaches at SUNY Stony Brook. . . . **CHANA BLOCH** and **CHANA KRONFELD** were awarded an NEA Fellowship for their translation of **YEHUDA AMICHAI**'s *Open Closed Open*, forthcoming from Harcourt Brace. . . .**RITA GABIS**, author of *The Wild Fields* (Alice James Books), lives and teaches in New York City. . . . **LEN ROBERTS** received an NEH Fellowship in 1999 to continue his work on Hungarian poet Sándor Csoóri. . . .**BRIAN SWANN** teaches at Cooper Union. . . . **PETER DALE SCOTT**'s *Minding the Darkness* will be published by New Directions, completing his poetic trilogy *Seculum*. . . . *And Still the Bird Sings* (Ohio University Press) is **LUCIEN STRYK**'s most recent collection. . . . **MOHAMMAD NURUL HUDA** is a Bengali poet and literary essayist. . . . .poet and translator **CAROLYNE WRIGHT** is currently working on an investigative memoir of her experiences in Chile. . . .Bengali poet **NASIMA SULTANA** died in November 1997 at the age of forty. . . . **TED GENOWAYS** has just completed a volume of translations of **MIGUEL HERNÁNDEZ**'s poems. . . . **ROBERT HAHN** is President of Johnson State College in Vermont. . . .**ANDRÉE COLLIER** is working on an anthology of Czech women writers in English translation, and has also translated fiction by **EDA KRISEOVÁ**, author of *Václav Havel: The Authorized Biography*. . . . **HAZEL ROWLEY**'s *Richard Wright: A Biography* is forthcoming from Henry Holt Press. . . .**TERRY TEACHOUT** is working on a biography of H.L. Mencken. . . . **KAREN WILKIN**'s *Cezanne* is available from Abbeville Press. . . . **ROBERT WEIL**, Executive Editor at W. W. Norton & Co., edited *Elegy for Iris* and *Iris & Her Friends*, the most recent books by Oxford University Professor of English **JOHN BAYLEY**. . . .**PAUL HOLLANDER**, Professor of Sociology at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, recently published *Political Will and Personal Belief*. . . .**LELDE MUEHLENBACHS** is a curator, writer, and painter currently living in Alberta, Canada. . . .**BURTON PIKE** is Professor of Comparative Literature and German at the Graduate School, City University of New York. . . .**DAVID YAFFE** is currently writing a book about the jazz aesthetic in American literature. . . .**NICOLE KRAUSS**, whose poems have appeared in the British anthology *New Poetics II* (Carcanet), is making a documentary on the late Joseph Brodsky for the BBC's Radio 3.

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COMMENTS

Hilton Kramer's new book, which deals with such themes as anti-Stalinism and anti-radicalism as well as trendy cultural subjects, is interesting and strong. He pays tribute to the community and vigor of the New York Intellectuals in the thirties and forties, and has a sad comment on the low level of intellectual life today. He has an acute piece about Whittaker Chambers, praising his autobiography as one of the great works of this century. There is a sharp evaluation of Lillian Hellman, pointing out her hidden communist affiliations and her revisions of her life. He has a lively piece about Josephine Herbst and her political and literary adventures. There is a laudatory review of Clement Greenberg's achievement, ensconcing him as the best art critic of our time. About Irving Howe, Kramer writes a measured evaluation, praising his literary work and putting down his politics. Also, there is a balanced comment on Kenneth Tynan, whom Kramer lauds purely as a theater critic, but he denounces his frivolous left-wing politics. A chapter is given to George Orwell's extraordinary accomplishments, not only in *1984* and *Animal Farm,* but also in his numerous, varied, and astute essays. And Kramer writes a perceptive appraisal of Cyril Connolly, whom he properly describes as a distinguished essayist and editor of the magazine *Horizon.*

Hilton is an esteemed friend, but I have a question and a disagreement. The question is how so staunch an anti-Stalinist could be friendly with apparatchiks like Josephine Herbst and Joseph Freeman, to the point of being the executor of Josephine Herbst's estate. I, myself, was a friend of Herbst during the year and a half I was a fellow traveller, but I broke with her when I broke with the Stalinists. The disagreement is about his remarking that Edith Kurzweil's anthology of political writings from *Partisan Review, A Partisan Century,* should have had more pieces revealing past mistakes. It seems to me that an anthology should not only be partially representative, but should mostly print the best pieces. In addition, many contributors refused to give permission to reprint works that they didn't think of especially highly.

All in all, however, *The Twilight of the Intellectuals: Culture and Politics in the Era of the Cold War* is a vivid and impressive performance.

WP

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SUSAN DUNN

Enlightenment Legacies

The United States and France celebrate their nationhood on July 4 and July 14, dates that commemorate a revolutionary declaration of independence and the people's storming of a hated symbol of the *ancien régime*, the Bastille. On those summer days, red, white, and blue revolutionary flags fly gaily over American and French cities and villages. Colorful parades and fireworks, complemented by backyard barbecues and picnics, echo people's patriotic joy.

As American and French citizens jubilantly fête their love of country, are the courageous, violent revolutionary movements that accompanied their nations' births still remembered? July 4 and July 14 survive as summer festivals more than as historical commemorations, and people tend to forget the political audacity and courage of the men and women who fought to break with the past and transform their societies—so much so that during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the United States and France only rarely supported or encouraged other nations struggling for independence, liberty, and equality.

France fought, at a tremendous cost in lives and money, to retain her colonial outposts in Vietnam and Algeria and to deny their indigenous peoples rights to independence and self-determination. The United States has supported a plethora of dictators: Diem in South Vietnam, Batista in Cuba, Marcos in the Philippines, the Shah of Iran, Duvalier in Haiti, Pinochet in Chile. The list is disheartening. Only in March 1998 did the American Congress pass, by the smallest of margins, a bill allowing Puerto Ricans to vote on their own political status. France and the United States have become, as the historian David Brion Davis suggests, the world's leading adversaries of popular revolutions.

Thomas Jefferson would have been profoundly saddened, for his vision of the United States was inseparable from the idea of revolution. Though he advised people to be prudent and not to engage in traumatic revolution for merely "transient causes," Jefferson nevertheless felt that when people are subject to a despotic regime, revolution is not only their right, "it is

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their duty." He also went even further, linking the survival of the young American republic to the success of revolutions abroad. A positive outcome of the French Revolution was crucial to prevent the young American nation from devolving into a conservative, English-style system. Successful foreign revolutions were essential, Jefferson wrote to George Mason, to further America's "liberating mission abroad" as well as "to protect liberty at home."

For Abraham Lincoln, too, the meaning of the American Revolution was its universal, enduring promise of freedom and equality. After his election in 1860 Lincoln observed that the Revolution "was not the mere matter of separation of the colonies from the motherland" but rather the message contained in the Declaration of Independence "which gave liberty not alone to the people of this country, but hope to all the world, for all future time."

The French were no different: they also had believed in the universality of their Revolution. The Declaration of November 19, 1792 promised fraternity with all oppressed people. It was France's sacred duty to help "all the peoples who wish to regain their freedom." But two restorations of the monarchy, two empires, and the pretensions and responsibilities of colonialism snuffed out most of France's revolutionary ardor, leaving her to draft a conservative, republican constitution in 1875.

Still, modern revolutionary leaders around the world have often turned to the two great sister revolutions for inspiration and guidance, finding in French and American foundational documents universal ideals of freedom and equality, a radiant Enlightenment promise of justice for all. American and French revolutionary institutions supplied models for the creation of democratic governments in other lands. The sister revolutions offered modern revolutionary leaders a script to follow—war of liberation, constitutional convention, bill of rights, the creation of political parties—and also warned of dangerous shoals to avoid—terror, extremism, reaction.

Revolutions, hypothesized the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, "are not constituted by barricades, but by states of mind." Although a vast number of factors contribute to revolutionary momentum—from class conflict to famine—the intellectual, Gasset insisted, "is always to be found in the center of the revolutionary stage." The intellectual, a student of history, never ignores the past. Indeed, for over two centuries, the sister revolutions provided a revolutionary tradition, a "usable past," and practical guideposts for modern insurgents. Over and over again, modern revolutionaries, such as Frederick Douglass, Lenin, Ho Chi Minh, and Nelson Mandela, conceived their own revolutionary projects within the frameworks of the sister revolutions.

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"George Washington can never be claimed as a fanatic," wrote Frederick Douglass in 1857, a few years before the Civil War. Had Washington lived in the mid-nineteenth century, he continued, he would have been "a terror of the slaveholders." Douglass portrayed the nation's founders as good, beneficent fathers who wished for the freedom of all their "children"—white and black. America's most extraordinary abolitionist anchored his appeal for the emancipation of slaves in his praise for the American revolutionary tradition.

Douglass recognized the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as the radical documents of a new, revolutionary order, and he challenged Americans to live up to their spirit and principles. "Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions," he declared, "in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost." Southerners, he bristled, tried to distort the nation's revolutionary past by reading the Constitution as a proslavery document. They claimed that slaveholding was a part of the Constitution, sanctioned by the founders, and that they even had the right to hunt down fugitive slaves.

Douglass angrily rejected such misrepresentations. The Constitution, he announced, was "a glorious liberty document." Not once, he insisted, did the words "slave," "slavery," or "slaveholder" appear in the Constitution. There was not a single principle in the Constitution that was not entirely hostile to the existence of slavery.

The founding fathers represented the epitome of rationality and morality; they were the "brains, heart and soul" of the Republic, and they despised slavery. Washington, Douglass asserted, "desired to see Slavery abolished, and would gladly give his vote for such abolition"; Jefferson "trembled for his country when he reflected that God was just"; Franklin served as President of the first Abolition Society in America; and Madison utterly rejected the idea that human beings could constitute the property of others.

But Americans had betrayed their great revolutionary heritage. The Fourth of July, Douglass bitterly confessed, reminds the black man only of "the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim." "I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary," he bristled. "The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. . . .This Fourth of July is *yours*, not *mine*. *You* may rejoice, *I* must mourn."

The future lay in a return to the nation's heritage, in a renewed commitment to America's founding principles. America, he warned, must not be "false to the past."

Violence, it could not be denied, belonged to that noble American tradition. Turning away from William Lloyd Garrison's philosophy of

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nonviolence and nonresistance, Douglass reminded his listeners that Americans had drenched the soil in blood merely to escape the payment of a three-penny tax upon tea! Why was it glorious, he asked, for Patrick Henry to shout "Give me liberty or give me death!" but a "crime" to save a black man, a fugitive slave, from bondage by shooting the "monster" who tracks him down to return him to slavery? Douglass recalled Jefferson's comment that one hour of bondage "is worse than ages of that which our fathers rose in rebellion to oppose."

But reserved, church-going Bostonians were shocked to hear Douglass defend violence. "I should welcome the intelligence tomorrow," he had told them, "that the slaves had risen in the South, and that the sable arms. . .were engaged in spreading death and devastation." Perceiving the alarm his remarks aroused, he chided his audience for greeting the news of foreign revolutions with joy but fearing similar upheaval and transformation at home. "You shed tears over fallen Hungary," he scolded. "You are all on fire at the mention of liberty for France or for Ireland; but are as cold as an iceberg at the thought of liberty for the enslaved of America."

When Lincoln finally delivered his Emancipation Proclamation, Douglass viewed it as a faithful return to the American revolutionary tradition. "We can scarcely conceive of a more complete revolution in the position of a nation," Douglass declared a few weeks later. "Mr. Lincoln has not exactly discovered a new truth," he said, "but has dared to apply an old truth, a truth which carried the American people safely through the war for independence."

Douglass not only anchored the abolitionist movement in the American revolutionary tradition, he also transcended that tradition. Women were in a kind of slavery too. Whereas a founder like John Adams considered slavery "an evil of Colossal magnitude" and could envisage rights for black men, political rights for women always remained inconceivable to Adams. At most, the husband of the brilliant and talented Abigail countenanced women's authority in the private sphere of the home.

Douglass's support for women's rights broke new ground. Sexual equality—the emancipation of "half the human family"—would be "a revolution," he proclaimed, "the most strange, radical, and stupendous that the world has ever witnessed." The struggle for equal rights for women recognized the morality, dignity, and rationality of all citizens. Every able citizen would be an active and responsible member of the national political community. "No man should be excluded from the Government on account of his color, no woman on account of her sex," Douglass asserted. "There should be no shoulder that does not bear its burden of the Government." Once women were active in the public arena, society itself would be transformed by their intellect and "remarkable intuition" in

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public affairs. "Let women go to the polls and express their will, and we shall have different men and measures than we have now."

Douglass even surpassed the female leaders of the women's movement, for some of them, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, could not liberate themselves from their own retrograde racism. After ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, guaranteeing black male suffrage, Stanton was outraged. Women were surely more qualified to vote than Negro men, she sputtered, classing them with "idiots and lunatics" and dismissing them as so many Sambos. It was Douglass who proved to be one of the truest revolutionaries of the nineteenth century, following the American revolutionary tradition and then forging ahead on his own.

For several months in 1918, Robespierre stood in the Kremlin. A likeness of the French revolutionary had been ordered personally by Lenin, the head of the new Russian government, to embellish the capital of the Soviet republic. But neither bronze nor marble had been available, for the October Revolution was also a time of civil war, foreign invasion, bread shortages, sacrifice, and suffering. The statue was sculpted in weak, temporary stone. Cracks soon formed and widened, and Robespierre eventually crumbled. The statue's collapse from within probably never caused Lenin to wonder about the fragility of the French model of revolution. On the contrary, he considered himself a Jacobin, like Robespierre, who would not recoil from the use of terror to achieve his ends.

The American Revolution never ignited Lenin's imagination. He would probably have viewed it as no more than an anti-colonial revolt, too conservative to attempt any kind of radical social restructuring. Political power after the American Revolution remained in the hands of the same "bourgeois" interests who had possessed power during English colonial rule. Moreover, a Constitution, parliament, and guarantees of civil liberties held no attraction for Lenin, as the historian Richard Pipes points out. Political liberalization, Lenin wrote in 1894, only fortifies the position of the bourgeoisie. The time had come, Lenin declared, to separate socialism from democracy.

But the French Revolution was Lenin's kind of meat. The events of 1789 and 1793 were his guide book for eradicating a feudal past, eliminating political opposition, and institutionalizing terror. Its pages pointed out the three-star monuments to be revisited (the elimination of dissent, purges, and capital punishment), the tourist-traps to be avoided (factions, the counterrevolution of Thermidor), and the shrines of heroes to be admired. Indeed, Robespierre and the Jacobins furnished Lenin with models of tough, forceful, and creative revolutionary leadership. "One cannot be a Marxist," he wrote in 1915, "without entertaining the deepest respect for the

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great bourgeois revolutionaries (Robespierre, Garibaldi, and others). . .who roused tens of millions of people. . .in the struggle against feudalism."

Jacobin violence and repression, Lenin insisted, were the necessary tools for a successful revolutionary movement. Why was it "monstrous and criminal" for workers and peasants to use terror against the bourgeoisie, he demanded. When the British bourgeoisie used terror in 1649 and when the French bourgeoisie used it in 1793, it was considered "just and legitimate." If a bourgeois revolution like the one in France in 1793 had called for a Jacobin-style purge, Lenin remarked, then surely a Russian-style social revolution would require nothing less. "The dictatorship of the proletariat is an absolutely meaningless expression," he noted, "without Jacobin coercion." This ultimate goal could not be achieved without "the smashing and annihilation" of their enemies. Lenin did not view Jacobinism as a downward slide, but rather, as he wrote, "one of the highest pinnacles attained by the working class struggling for its emancipation."

Immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917, Lenin briefly distanced himself from the French Revolution, expressing reluctance to use repressive or violent Jacobin measures. "We are reproached with using terror," he announced. "But such terror, as was used by the French Revolutionaries who guillotined unarmed people, we do not use and, I hope, shall not use." But Bolshevik theory called for the "one-party state," a centralized party structure, and strong party discipline. Within weeks Lenin decided that neither dissent nor pluralism could play a helpful role in the smashing of the old regime. Opposition would have to be eliminated—by violence and terror if necessary. The Jacobins were back.

The splendid, glittering reception halls of the Smolny Institute in St. Petersburg, once a finishing school for the daughters of the Russian aristocracy, were the setting for the first open sessions in December 1917 of the Central Executive Committee. There, during the revolution's earliest days, I. N. Steinberg, the newly-appointed People's Commissar of Justice, witnessed the creation and organization of terror. He listened with horror as the revolution's leaders debated a decree demanding the arrest of the Kadets, the moderate Constitutional Democratic party. A few days earlier, the government had proclaimed them "enemies of the people." The Kadets had fought against czarism and had held power briefly from February to October 1917. But after the Bolshevik Revolution in October, some of their leaders had allied themselves with counterrevolutionary forces.

Would the new revolutionary parliament ratify the decree for their arrest? A victorious revolution, Steinberg protested, did not need to condemn its opponents with summary judgments. If an individual Kadet was accused of conspiracy, he reasoned, he should be brought to trial and have

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the right to a defense. But an entire group should not be placed "outside the pale of human law."

The moderate Steinberg suddenly perceived the specter of the French Terror, the exclusion and the liquidation of all factions and opposition. "We dared not simply and blindly repeat the mistakes of the French Revolution," he wrote. A hundred years earlier the Girondin Vergniaud had prophetically warned the Convention that the exclusion of moderate factions was only the beginning of repression. Soon all citizens would come under suspicion. Now Steinberg echoed Vergniaud. "Withdraw legal protection from the liberals today, and the same is likely to happen to other political groups tomorrow."

Rising to answer Steinberg, a furious, contemptuous Trotsky icily remarked that people should be "grateful" to be thrown in jail, for in past revolutions "they would have been taken to the Palace Square and there made. . .a head shorter!" (Trotsky himself was ultimately made a head shorter when an assassin, wielding a pickax, struck him in the head.) Finally Lenin spoke, evoking the model of the French Revolution, declaring that criticism of the Russian revolution would not be tolerated. "The great French Revolution," he recalled, "put the hostile parties outside the law." The Bolsheviks won the vote—150 to 98—to arrest their opponents.

All who opposed Government orders would be "destroyed on the spot," decreed Trotsky in a pamphlet he wrote in February 1918, in the wake of the attack of the German Army. The pamphlet, designed to awaken Russians' heroism and love for their country, concluded with this ominous threat of summary arrest and execution. Once again Steinberg strongly objected. At a meeting of the People's Commissars, he argued that this cruel threat undermined the "pathos" of Trotsky's manifesto. But Lenin, Steinberg later recalled in his memoirs, responded with derision, "Do you really believe that we can be victorious without the very cruelest revolutionary terror?" "Then why do we bother with a Commissariat of Justice?" Steinberg shouted. "Let's call it frankly the Commissariat for Social Extermination and be done with it!" Lenin's face suddenly brightened. "Well put," he replied. "That's exactly what it should be. . .but we can't say that."

The Bolsheviks, observed Steinberg, slavishly imitated the speech and behavior of the French Jacobins. "But," he added, "they forgot that the French Revolution itself was drowned in bloody defeat precisely because of its terrorism." Like their Girondin predecessors, Russian dissidents, including the revolution's own founders, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, were later liquidated or exiled for their deviation from the party line.

Within a year, the Commissar of Justice had become one of the revolution's prisoners. Steinberg was arrested in February 1919, thrown into

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the Butyrki prison in Moscow. "How shall one relate the grim emotions of a revolutionist thrown into a prison of the revolution?" he wrote, trying to describe his sense of disbelief. Yet his weary mind grasped the parallel with the French Revolution when men similarly fell "from the height of power to the gates of prison." In prison, Steinberg requested Jean Jaurès's *Socialist History of the French Revolution,* seeking to put order and understanding into his thoughts.

Lenin never held the Jacobins or the Terror responsible for the downfall of the French Revolution. On the contrary, he believed that it was the Thermidorean reaction, not the Terror, that had spelled the end of the French Revolution. In Thermidor, July 1794, members of the French National Convention had risen up and revolted against Robespierre, shouting "Down with the tyrant!" The following day, Robespierre, Saint-Just, and their allies were arrested and guillotined. Lenin was determined to avoid the trap of a Thermidor. In other words, he was convinced that compromise with moderate elements might sometimes be necessary to avoid a counterrevolutionary movement.

In the winter of 1918, there was just such a movement for popular democracy, the counterrevolution that Lenin had feared. The sailors at the strategic naval base of Kronstadt, located on an island off Russia's Baltic coast, revolted. Deeply discontented with party policy, they demanded liberal concessions for workers and peasants—freedom for trade unions, the release of political prisoners, an end to official propaganda, free elections of Soviets, freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Instead of negotiating with the sailors, the Bolshevik government issued an ultimatum and prepared for an attack. Lenin and Trotsky, according to Victor Serge, demanded that the rebels surrender "or be shot down like rabbits." When they refused to capitulate, units of the Red Army trekked across the ice to assault Kronstadt and the battleships, frozen in the water. The ice cracked under the advancing soldiers' feet; the freezing water swallowed them. For several weeks in March both sides fought a ferocious battle, but the rebels were finally overpowered. Some escaped to Finland; the rest were shot in Petrograd.

"This is Thermidor," declared Lenin. "But we shan't let ourselves be guillotined. We shall make a Thermidor ourselves." Lenin's response to the idealistic counterrevolution of Kronstadt was his own "counterrevolutionary" liberal economic package. He announced that he was willing to make a moderate swing to the right. Indeed, his "New Economic Policy" granted peasants some control over their production, gave artisans more freedom in their trades, and permitted some private trade and private ownership. Lenin had backtracked, endorsing a "partial restoration of capitalism." It was a "retreat," he said, but "for a new attack." Political freedom, however, was not included in the Thermidorean bargain.

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For Lenin, the French Revolution was not a failed movement but an unfinished one, a necessary stage in class history. He was convinced that the French Revolution, by furthering the rise of the bourgeoisie and the development of capitalism and by restructuring to a certain extent French society, had prepared the way for the eventual rise of the working class. The Russian Revolution would fulfill the promise of the French Revolution, finally inaugurating the reign of equality.

The Jacobins taught Lenin how to seize control of events, establish a disciplined ruling party, and steer the revolution ahead, following his ideological map. They also taught him not to concern himself with individual rights and liberties or with democracy, all of which had been left in the ditch. The Communist experiment in Russia lasted approximately seventy years. By the end of the twentieth century, Russian citizens and politicians recognized that Lenin's revolutionary project had failed economically, politically, and morally. When in 1989 Russians turned to a market economy, free elections, a multi-party system, political pluralism, and individual rights, were they not celebrating 1776 after all?

In September 1945, hundreds of thousands of people jammed the French-looking boulevards and streets of downtown Hanoi. They had traveled in oppressive heat from distant villages for the great day. Schools and offices were closed. Jubilant peasants wearing straw hats, workers, mountain people, militia members carrying spears, Catholic priests in their black suits and Buddhist monks in their saffron robes waited excitedly. All faces turned toward the platform erected in Ba Dinh Square, a large park near the French residential quarter.

A frail-looking wisp of a man advanced to the microphone. "All men are created equal," he declared, as all of Hanoi listened. "They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." He paused and then elaborated. "This immortal statement," he explained, "was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, this means: all the peoples on earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, to be happy and free."

That was not all. Just as Jefferson's immortal vision of unalienable rights and freedoms was followed by a kind of legal brief that documented at length all the abuses committed by King George III and the English Parliament against their American subjects, Ho Chi Minh similarly outlined the grievances of the Vietnamese against France, their colonial master. As his listeners strained to hear him, he reminded them that France was still attempting to destroy Vietnamese unity by artificially dividing the nation into three separate political regions, Tonkin, Annam, and

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Cochinchina. France burdened the Vietnamese with unjust taxes; France expropriated the people's land, rice fields and forests; France ruled by decree and not by law; she built prisons instead of schools, and in Indochina's darkest hour, France abandoned her to the Japanese.

Days earlier, Ho Chi Minh and his advisors had been laboring to recall as much of Jefferson's language as they could. Ho had memorized the opening lines of the Declaration when he visited the United States as a menial laborer on a tramp steamer before World War I, but his memory had faded. He wondered if one of the American intelligence officers serving in Vietnam could help. During World War II, James Patti headed the Viet Nam mission of the Office of Strategic Services, the OSS, the precursor of the CIA. During the summer and fall of 1945, Major Patti, along with Brigadier General Philip Gallagher and Captain Farris, observed Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh party. For Patti, Ho Chi Minh was a nationalist, not a "starry-eyed revolutionary or a flaming radical." "I felt he could be trusted as an ally against the Japanese," Patti recalled. "I saw that his ultimate goal was to attain American support for the cause of a free Viet Nam."

Ho explained to Patti that his draft of the Vietnamese declaration of independence needed polishing. Someone translated Ho's words as Patti listened carefully. Patti immediately realized that the translator was reading very familiar words. After the translator read a few sentences, Patti turned to Ho in amazement and asked if he really intended to use this text as his declaration of independence. "I don't know why it nettled me," Patti mused. "Perhaps a feeling of proprietary right, or something equally inane." Ho sat back in his chair, his palms together with fingertips touching his lips ever so lightly, as though meditating. "Should I not use it?" he asked. Patti was embarrassed. Why should Ho not use it? The translator started again: all men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; among these are liberty, life, and the pursuit of happiness. "Life must come before liberty," Patti remarked. Ho snapped to the point. "Why, of course, there is no liberty without life." Ho pressed Patti for more, but that was all the American could remember.

Would Ho Chi Minh have borrowed Jefferson's words for the joyous celebration of Vietnamese independence if he had not understood and identified with the Americans' eighteenth-century anti-colonial revolt, if he had not admired their revolutionary spirit? Perhaps there was a practical side to Ho's stratagem too. He might have felt that his use of Jefferson's Declaration would impart some legitimacy to his struggle, that it would be a signal to the Americans that he respected them, that he wanted their friendship as well as their support for his own sister revolution.

Indochinese independence had become a "near-obsession" for President Roosevelt during 1943 and 1944, and Ho's expectation that the United

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States would support his independence movement was entirely reasonable. Historians view Roosevelt's ideals as unquestionably anticolonial, though they note that he lacked a clear strategy for achieving these goals. To his Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Roosevelt spoke frankly about Indochina. "France has milked Indo-China for one hundred years," Roosevelt wrote in a memo. "The people of Indo-China are entitled to something better than that." Roosevelt's promise to grant independence to the Philippines buoyed Ho Chi Minh, for the American president had also urged the European colonial powers to grant independence to their own colonies.

After Roosevelt's death, however, America's diplomatic policy changed sharply. Only a few months after Ho's declaration of independence, the American State Department's Far Eastern Bureau declared that the United States would respect French sovereignty in Indochina. Roosevelt's anticolonialism was displaced by the Cold War's demands for an anti-communist foreign policy. By 1946 all official American references to Ho in Washington were prefixed with the word "Communist." Dean Acheson, the Acting Secretary of State, branded Ho Chi Minh an "agent of international communism." Though the American OSS officers in Hanoi had liked and trusted Ho, even joining him in celebrating his Vietnamese "Fourth of July," by the end of the decade Ho had been transformed into a Communist enemy.

A State Department paper written in 1949, "The Position of the United States with Respect to Indochina," announced that the new challenge facing the United States was to "prevent expansion of communist aggression in that area." China's and Russia's recent recognition of Ho's government worried the State Department. American analysts considered it likely that Thailand and Burma would fall under communist domination if Indochina succumbed to communist control. The conclusion reached in this paper came to be known as the "domino principle." "It is important to the United States security interests," the paper ended, "that all practical measures be taken to prevent further communist expansion in Southeast Asia." The Truman government decided to back the French effort to retain control over Vietnam, and in the early 1950s, the United States contributed hefty sums to their military campaign to keep Indochina a French colony.

But the French and their American supporters underestimated the determination of the Viet Minh. The dramatic battle of Dien Bien Phu was fought in a valley near the Laotian border. The French found themselves encircled by the revolutionary Vietnamese troops, "sitting ducks" for their fire. The French defeat was humiliating and definitive. At long last Ho Chi Minh's dream of a unified, independent Vietnam seemed within reach. The Geneva Settlement in 1954 temporarily divided Vietnam along

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the seventeenth parallel, but stipulated that a Vietnam-wide election would take place in 1956 to decide the question of reunification. The United States refused to sign the Geneva accord, and the stipulated elections never took place.

Ho Chi Minh once again turned to American history—this time not for inspiration but rather to underline America's betrayal of her own revolutionary ideals. Pointing to George Washington, the military leader of the colonial revolt, to Lincoln, the courageous warrior for equality and national unity, and to the anticolonial Roosevelt, Ho composed an open letter to President Dwight Eisenhower. "You are, Mr. President, the inheritor of the great leaders of the United States," he wrote, "Washington, Lincoln or Roosevelt. . . .You speak often of peace and justice. . . .But, in your actions toward Viet Nam, your policy is the opposite." How different twentieth-century history might have been if Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy had understood the depth of the anticolonial aspirations in Vietnam. But Kennedy dismissed the warning of Charles de Gaulle who cautioned the young American president not to become entrapped in the "bottomless military and political swamp" of Vietnam. An earlier American president too had been deaf to Vietnamese pleas for support for their independence.

That was in 1919. The activity in Versailles was intense: diplomats and their assistants rushing around, dozens of typewriters pounding away, the monotone voices of translators echoing in the great mirrored halls. The Big Four, the victors of the war, held court. Woodrow Wilson, Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau, and Vittorio Orlando were setting the terms of the peace—and of the future. T. E. Lawrence, garbed in his exotic Arab headcloth, his khaki uniform and British badges, arrived with Prince Feisal to appeal for independence for Syria and Mesopotamia. A less conspicuous and less celebrated petitioner than Lawrence of Arabia also appeared, desiring an audience for his cause. He was a young, small man, uncomfortable in his rented tuxedo. He was a Vietnamese—or an "Annamite," as the French then said—named Nguyen Ai Quoc, one of the dozens of aliases of the future Ho Chi Minh.

He had come to Versailles inspired by President Wilson's Fourteen Points, especially Wilson's recognition of the right of nations to self-determination. Still, the program he hoped to present to President Wilson in Versailles was a modest one. He was not asking for anything so bold as independence for Vietnam. His "eight points" included equality before the law for Vietnamese as well as for French citizens in Indochina, amnesty for political prisoners, government by law, not by decree, a permanent delegation of Vietnamese representatives in the French parliament, and some civil rights—freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

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He was totally ignored. When he tried to obtain a hearing, Wilson neither received him nor acknowledged his appeal. Despite the American leader's principle of self-determination for all nations, Vietnam to him did not exist. Wilson focused all of his energy on his political vision: the creation of a League of Nations. At such a critical moment, the American president felt that he could not risk alienating his French allies by undermining their colonial empire. Indeed, as the historian-statesman Conor Cruise O'Brien noted, whereas underdeveloped countries would eventually have an important voice in the United Nations, Wilson's League of Nations represented the "haves of the world against the have-nots."

On the one hand, Ho must have been disappointed to have his cause rejected out of hand at the Peace Conference. On the other, the young man had traveled only a very short distance to reach Versailles. In 1917, at the age of twenty-seven, he had moved to Paris to study "what lay behind the words *liberté, égalité, fraternité.*" As a young boy in Vietnam, he had seen the revolutionary slogan inscribed in stone on public buildings. What did the words mean? What did the French Revolution stand for? It was difficult to come by answers. French authorities forbade the translation of Rousseau and Montesquieu into Vietnamese. In libraries in Vietnam, works on the French Revolution existed only in French and were inaccessible in Vietnamese.

After World War I, Paris was the exciting haven for scores of dissidents and revolutionaries from the French colonies and from the rest of Europe. Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping lived there in the twenties as did one of the pioneers of Vietnamese nationalism, Phan Chu Trinh. Ho enjoyed wandering around the streets of Paris with his friends, discussing the future of Asia.

Though Woodrow Wilson had not even recognized Ho's presence, Ho attracted the attention of some of France's leading socialists, including Leon Blum. In Paris, Ho joined the French Socialist Party. He later admitted that he joined the socialists because those "ladies and gentlemen. . .had shown sympathy toward me, toward the struggle of the oppressed people."

In Ho's first serious work of political propaganda, *French Colonization on Trial,* he described the French colonial system, detailing its injustices along with the sadism of colonial rulers. The forced participation of colonized people in World War I especially enraged him. Suddenly, second-class "dirty Negroes and dirty Annamese," he bitterly remarked, were promoted to the supreme rank of "defenders of law and liberty," forced to fight for rights and freedoms of which they themselves were deprived. They were obliged to leave their "rice fields or their sheep, their children and their wives in order to cross oceans and go and rot on the battlefields of Europe."

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The French colonial strategy, Ho explained, robbed the colonized people not only of independence but also of their sense of solidarity and nationhood. He accused the French of dividing each of their colonies into separate political entities, rupturing a people's sense of oneness, criticism at least partially unfair since some of these "divisions" had long existed along tribal lines and pre-dated the arrival of the French. Also insidious, according to Ho, was the French strategy of turning one colonized people against another, forcing Algerians to fight in Vietnam and obliging the Vietnamese to fight for French interests in Africa. Brothers were turned against brothers.

France's revolutionary decree of November 1792 had memorably promised "fraternity and help to all the peoples who wish to regain their freedom." But the French had betrayed their revolutionary promise of fraternity with all oppressed peoples. In the twentieth century, Ho concluded, exploitation had replaced comradeship. Only in Russia, he believed, was fraternity alive and well.

Rebuffed at Versailles, Ho Chi Minh left Paris for Moscow. Lenin, he decided, was the "personification of universal fraternity," the inheritor of the French Revolution's oath of fraternity with all oppressed people. Lenin had not only liberated the men and women of his own country, Ho wrote, he showed the way to all the disinherited of the universe. He called Leninism "a compass" for the Vietnamese, "the radiant sun illuminating our path to final victory, to Socialism and Communism."

Ho Chi Minh returned to Vietnam in 1941—after an absence of thirty years. Was he a Communist, a socialist? Above all, he was a nationalist and a hard-nosed pragmatist who wanted independence for his nation—independence from the French and the Japanese. In later decades he demanded independence from the Americans no less than from the Chinese and Russians.

After World War II, Ho never ceased to remind the French and American invaders of their revolutionary traditions. As late as 1965, he told an American interviewer that "this aggressive war has. . .besmeared the good name of the United States, the country of Washington and Lincoln." To the French colonial masters, he called out, "Frenchmen in Indochina! It is now up to you to show that you are worthy children of the glorious heroes who struggled for liberty, equality and fraternity." But the French Revolution also taught Ho how to wield political power mercilessly. "The French Revolution sacrificed many people without flinching," he wrote. "If we want to wage revolution, we must not be afraid of sacrifices either." Ho will indeed be remembered not only for his single-minded nationalism but also for his ruthless land reforms in 1955, hideous massacres of civilians, and other atrocities.

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Ho fought for fifty years against France and then against the United States, the two revolutionary nations that, at mid-century, had become fiercely anti-revolutionary. And yet, though France and America refused to aid the Vietnamese in their quest for independence, their revolutions and ideals still emitted gleams of light, sporadically illuminating the revolutionary path.

Must a revolution be violent to qualify for the title of revolution? Does the transformation of a society and a government require the suspension of constitutional law and individual rights and freedoms? Are political executions *de rigueur*?

The revolution that took place in South Africa in the early 1990s broke with the mold. "No models hold for us," wrote the South African newspaperman Denis Beckett in 1991. "We're entirely on our own."

He was right. For here was a revolution that transformed South African society but at the same time validated compromise and negotiation. It was a revolution that took place within the existing political framework. Instead of vengeance, there was a desire for reconciliation. Instead of purges, there was amnesty. The victors wanted apologies, not heads. The political losers, including embittered and recalcitrant ones, were tolerated, not outlawed, and they were included within the newly configured political arena. Throughout all the turmoil and dramatic change, there was never a large-scale resistance movement against majority black rule or a revolt in the security forces or in the military.

It was, moreover, a revolution conducted by black leaders who recognized the valuable economic leadership of the white settler minority and by pragmatic white leaders, like F. W. de Klerk, who preferred preserving capitalism to insisting on white political hegemony. Black revolutionary leaders never demanded or encouraged, as in Algeria, the expulsion of the colonial community from the country. They did not seek to eliminate, as in eighteenth-century France, an elite social class—or even to level society, despite the grinding poverty of the majority of citizens. Nelson Mandela always envisioned the two races eventually living together in harmony.

Even when, as a young man, Mandela was designing plans for sabotage of the South African infrastructure, his ultimate goal was reconciliation and coexistence with the white minority. The choices open to the African National Congress movement, Mandela explained in his autobiography, were open revolution, terrorism, guerrilla warfare, or sabotage. "It made sense," he wrote, "to start with the form of violence that inflicted the least harm against individuals: sabotage." Because it involved minimal loss of life, sabotage offered the best hope for eventual racial reconciliation. "We did not want to start a blood feud among the races," Mandela remarked.

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Foreign governments also adopted a new attitude towards this particular revolution. The United States and France seemed suddenly to rediscover the morality of a revolutionary struggle for liberation. Only twenty years after their attempts to suppress movements for independence in Vietnam and Algeria, they denounced colonialism in South Africa, imposed economic sanctions, and supported boycotts against an illegitimate white minority government.

The revolution in South Africa began in 1989 when F. W. de Klerk released Nelson Mandela from prison. His reason? He needed someone with whom to negotiate. Everything had been going wrong in South Africa: decades of violent acts of terror and desperation on one side and brutal repression on the other; the ominous defeat of South African troops by Cuban troops in Angola; an untenable political and military situation in neighboring Namibia; growing white South African resistance to more (white) military casualties; general civil unrest; international economic pressure; the rise of a new generation of emboldened black South African radicals. Finally, white South Africans made a calculated decision to enter into negotiations with moderate black South Africans. The bans on the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party were lifted.

After Mandela's liberation and after the white government's introduction of some insignificant token reforms that chipped away at apartheid, the last stage of the political and moral struggle against apartheid began. De Klerk, breaking with the traditional thinking in his party, came to realize that apartheid could not be "reformed," that there were no political solutions short of black enfranchisement, and that fortunately the ANC was a liberal democratic party that would protect political rights as well as private property. Thus, in this final stage, neither side propounded intransigent, ideological or extremist stands. Both sides appeared willing to work for what each considered, in its own way, the "common good"—though the common good was conceived as continuing prosperity for the white minority and as redistribution of the wealth for the black majority.

To their great credit, de Klerk and Mandela proved Trotsky wrong. "History on the whole," the Russian had commented, "knows of no revolution that was accomplished in a democratic way. . . .Classes never consent to lose possessions, power and 'honour' by observing the rules of the game of 'democratic' parliamentarism." But in South Africa in the early 1990s, the established powers did not respond with violence to the movement to transform South African society.

Revolutionary politicians in South Africa seem to have followed the American revolutionary model rather than the French one. "As freedom fighters we could not have known of such men as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson," said Nelson Mandela when he

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met with President George Bush, "and not been moved to act as they were moved to act."

Indeed, Mandela borrowed the best of that American tradition and incorporated it into his own unique revolutionary movement. And yet, despite an attempt to be inclusive and pluralist, South Africa, for all intents and purposes, is a one-party state. So entrenched is the black majority that the ANC seems likely to be the permanent party in power. In a healthy democracy, the party in power and the opposition alternately govern; minorities and majorities alternate, and there is no disempowered "permanent" minority. Can a vital multi-party system exist and succeed in South Africa? Perhaps. It is at least a possibility that internal dissension within the ANC may cause that party eventually to split into different factions. But until then, there will be a permanent minority and a permanent majority, a situation that inevitably weakens the democratic spirit and mores of a nation.

Can South African democracy survive without a vital two-party system? Can the nonvindictive republic survive the eventual death of the charismatic and conciliatory Nelson Mandela? For how long will political power compensate the majority for their lack of economic power? Will radical elements inflamed by continuing economic inequality fragment the ANC? And will the resulting fragmentation of the majority party threaten or strengthen this constitutional democracy?

The ringing phrases, the heroes, and the myths of the eighteenth-century sister revolutions have been passed down through the generations virtually intact. After two hundred years, "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" as well as "*liberté, égalité, fraternité*" still resonate around the world.

Curiously, for all its myriad complexities and failures, the appeal of the French Revolution is its *clarity*. For the French Revolution conceived itself in terms of a Manichaean struggle between good and evil—between patriots and traitors, believers and non-believers. The struggle between insiders and outsiders required the unity of those on the inside; and next to that ideal of unity, pluralism and the protection of individual and minority rights seemed counterrevolutionary. Lenin, like Robespierre himself, could justify his revolution's repressive features in the name of the unity of the people and their unrelenting battle against reaction and privilege.

Ambiguity, on the other hand, characterizes the American Revolution, making it a less popular model. For it evokes not ideological clarity or a struggle against perfidious traitors but rather conflicting interest groups and competing political parties—as well as the ultimate contradiction of slavery, the legal dehumanization of people in a nation founded on the conviction that "all men are created equal." For Frederick Douglass,

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this contradiction provided a fruitful challenge as well as a wealth of rhetorical material for his speeches. And perhaps even for Nelson Mandela, the American paradox of a revolutionary nation with a history of racial division could offer insight into the uncertainty of progress.

Tocqueville remarked that in France, people's passion was for revolutionary ideas, while in America, their passion was for democratic ones. Is it possible to reconcile these two passions and offer modern revolutionary movements a third political model? If one deplorable, repressive regime is not to replace another, burgeoning nations might profit from some inspiration and political guidance, for they need institutions that can enable leaders to make sweeping changes while providing order, justice, equality, and freedom. The era of revolutions is not over, and future revolutionary movements might profit from a model that synthesizes the energy of the French Revolution with the stability of the American Revolution, a model that moderates revolutionary fervor with tolerance for ideological diversity and respect for political opposition, a model that hurls a few bolts of French lightning into our sky of eighteenth-century American light.

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MICHAL GOVRIN

The Journey to Poland

In late October 1975, when I was in my early twenties and completing my doctorate in Paris, I went to Poland. An almost impossible journey then for a young woman, alone, with an Israeli passport, at the time when there were no diplomatic relations between the Eastern Bloc and Israel. (It was only because of a French-Jewish friend, who turned me into a "Representative of France" at the International Theater Festival in Wroclaw [Breslau], that I received a special visa for a week.)

The night before the trip, when everything was ready, I called my parents in Tel Aviv and told them. I asked my shocked mother for the exact address of her family home in Kraków. Only later that winter, when I visited Israel, did I understand what profound emotion took hold of my mother's few surviving friends and relatives from Kraków when they heard of the trip.

A week later I returned to Paris. For twenty-four hours, I closed myself in my student apartment in the Latin Quarter, far from the Parisian street scenes, and feverishly wrote to my parents. A letter of more than twenty pages. First thoughts, a summary of the rapid notes taken on the trip. Even the words groped for another language, for a different level of discourse.

That year, as every year, a commemoration for the Jewish community of Kraków was held in the auditorium of my high school in Tel Aviv. News of my trip and of that letter reached the members of the community, and they wanted to read it aloud at that commemoration. I agreed, and after it was commandeered from the family circle, I submitted it for publication to the literary supplement of the newspaper, *Davar,* with the title, "Letter from Regions of Delusion" (the expression "Regions of Delusion" borrowed from the title of a parable attributed to the Ba'al Shem Tov). Aside from some peripheral changes of style, that text appears here.

Travelling to Poland in '75 was not part of the social phenomenon it is today. The group definition of "second-generation Holocaust survivors" hadn't yet been coined. You had to find out everything by yourself. How to plan the trip and how to feel, how to talk about it. The letter to my parents began a long process of formulation. Even the choice of parents as the addressees of an intimate discourse was not the norm then.

Today, that trip seems like a geological rift that changed my emotional and intellectual landscape, and placed its seal on my writing. Yet the

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"journey to Poland" didn't begin in '75, but in early childhood, in Tel Aviv in the 1950s. Distant shocks preceded the rift.

The "journey to Poland" began in that journey "to there"—the journey every child makes to the regions of before he was born, to the unknown past of his parents, to the secret of his birth. My journey to Mother's world began long before I "understood" who my mother, Regina-Rina Poser-Laub-Govrin, was, before I "knew" that she survived the "Holocaust," that she once had another husband, that I had a half-brother. But there was the other "knowledge," that knowledge of pre-knowledge and of pre-language, transmitted in the thousand languages that connect a child and his parents without words. A knowledge that lay like a dark cloud on the horizon. Terrifying and seductive.

For years the journey proceeded on a double track. One outside the home and one inside it. And there was an almost complete separation between the two. As if everything that was said outside had nothing to do with Mother. Outside, incomprehensible, violent stories about the "Holocaust" were forced upon the little girl's consciousness. In school assemblies, in lessons for Holocaust Memorial Day, and later on in lessons of "Annals of the Jewish People," which were taught separately from "history" classes, and described events that happened in "another, Jewish time and place," where King David and small-town Jews strolled among the goats and railroad cars of the ghetto. Even the Eichmann Trial, on the radio in school and at home, was an event you had to listen to, but it had no real relation to Mother. (And even if things were said about it then at home, I succeeded in repressing them from consciousness.)

At home, there were bright stories about Kraków, the boulevards, the Hebrew high school, the cook, the maids, about skiing and summer holidays in the mountains, in Zakopane, and sometimes on Friday evening, Mother and I would dance a "Krakowiak" on the big rug in the living room. And there was Mother's compulsive forced-labor house cleaning, and her periods of rage and despair when I didn't straighten up my room (what I called "prophecies of rage" with self-defensive cunning), there was the everlasting, frightened struggle to make me eat, and there was the disconnected silence that enveloped her when she didn't get out of bed on Yom Kippur. And there was the photo album "from there" at the bottom of Mother's lingerie drawer, with unfamiliar images, and also pictures of a boy, Marek. And stories about him, joyful, a baby in a cradle on the balcony, a beautiful child on the boulevard. And a tender memory of the goggle-moggle with sugar he loved so much (and only years later did I understand the terrifying circumstances of that). And there were the weekly get-togethers at Aunt Tonka's house (who was never introduced as the widow of Mother's older brother

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who was murdered), get-togethers so different from the humorous, confident gatherings of Father's family (members of the Third Aliyah and the leadership of the Yishuv and the state). At night, in Aunt Tonka's modest apartment, I was the only little girl—"a blonde, she looks like a *shiksa*"—in the middle of the Polish conversation of "friends from there." And every year there were also the visits of Schindler, when you could go all dressed up with Mother's cousin to greet him at the Dan Hotel. And once, when Mother and I were coming back from "the city" on bus number 22, Mother stopped next to the driver and blurted a short sentence at him for no reason. The driver, a gray-haired man in a jacket, was silent and turned his head away. "He was a ca-po," she said when we got off, pronouncing the pair of incomprehensible syllables gravely. All that was part of the cloud that darkened the horizon, yes, but had nothing to do with what was mentioned at school or on the radio.

Poland and Kraków weren't "real" places either, no more than King Solomon's Temple, for instance. I remember how stunned I was when I went with Mother to the film *King Matthew the First*, based on the children's story by Janusz Korszak which I had read in Hebrew. In the film, the children spoke Polish! And it didn't sound like the language of the friends at Aunt Tonka's house. "Nice Polish," Mother explained, "of Poles." Poles? They apparently do exist somewhere.

Yet, a few events did form a first bridge between outside and inside. One day, in a used book store in south Tel Aviv, Mother bought an album of black and white photos of Kraków. "Because the photos are beautiful," she emphasized, "they have artistic value." And indeed, the sights of the Renaissance city in the four seasons flowed before my eyes. A beautiful, tranquil city, full of greenery and towers. Jews? No, there were no Jews in that album, maybe only a few alleys "on the way to Kazimierz."

At the age of ten, my parents sent me for private lessons in English, because "it's important to know languages." And thus I came to Mrs. Spiro, a gentle woman from London, married to Doctor Spiro, Mother's classmate from the Hebrew high school in Kraków. One day, when the lesson was over, Mrs. Spiro accompanied me to the edge of the yard of their house on King Solomon Street. I recall the sidewalk with big paving stones as she talked with me. Maybe I had complained before about Mother's strict demands, or maybe she started talking on her own.

"Of course, you know what your mother went through; she was in the Holocaust. You have to understand her, the tensions she has sometimes," she said to me directly.

That was an earthquake. A double one. The understanding that Mother was in "the Holocaust," that awful thing they talk about in school

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assemblies, with "the six million." And that I, a ten-year-old girl, had to or even could "understand Mother." That is, to leave the symbiosis of mother and daughter constituting one expanded body, to cut myself off from my child's view, and see Mother as a separate person, with her own fate and reasons for moods that didn't depend only on me, or on my certain guilt. I remember how, at that moment, facing the spotted paving stones, I understood both those things all at once. Like a blinding blow.

Then came high school in Tel Aviv. Since both the principal and the assistant principal were graduates of the Hebrew High School in Kraków, their former classmates in that high school, including my mother, sent their children to study there. At that school, influenced by the principal and his assistant, both of them historians, there was an intense awareness of the Jewish past and life in the Diaspora—a rare dimension in the Zionist-Israeli landscape of Diaspora denial—and Gideon Hausner, the prosecutor in the Eichmann Trial, initiated a "club to immortalize the Jewish community of Kraków." A group of students met with members of the Kraków community, who taught them the history of the city and the Jewish community before the destruction. The club also heard testimony from the Holocaust, with a special (exclusive?) emphasis on the activities of the Jewish underground. The women's revolt in the Gestapo prison, led by Justina, was also dramatized and performed for the community members on the annual memorial day. ("Holocaust celebrations," as the memorials were called by members of the drama club.)

I was a member of the "club to immortalize," and I also played a Polish cook in the performance of the history of the uprising. But in fact, a partition still remained between me and the others, a zone of silence so dense that, to this day, I don't know which of the children of the Kraków community members were children of Holocaust survivors and not of parents who emigrated to Palestine before the war. If there were any, no bond was formed between us. We didn't talk about it. We remained isolated, caged in the sealed biographies of our parents.

There were other bridges here too, almost subterranean ones, which, as far as I recall, were not formulated explicitly. The bond with the literature teacher, the poet, Itamar Yaoz-Kest, who survived as a child with his mother in Bergen-Belsen. In high school, there were only his influence on my literary development and a sense of closeness, a sort of secret look between "others." (Only later did I read the poems of *The Double Root* about his childhood "there," and his story describing, as he put it, a little girl who looked like me, the daughter of survivors.) And there was the love affair with the boy in my class, whose delicate smile on his drooping lower lip looked like the "different" smile of the literature teacher. His father, the lawyer, submitted reparations claims to Germany in those days—close

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enough to the seductive-dangerous realm. My complicated relations with that boy paralleled the shock of discovery of Kafka; and along with the tempest of feelings of fifteen-year-olds, that forbidden, denied, inflamed relation also had a pungent mixture of *eros* and sadism, a tenderness and an attraction to death, and above all, metaphysical dimensions that pierced the abyss of dark feelings which somehow was also part of "there."

In my childhood, when Mother was an omnipotent entity within the house, I couldn't "understand" her. Later, when she became the authority to rebel against, the enzyme necessary to cut the fruit off from the branch erected a dam of alienation and enmity between us; I couldn't identify with her, with her humanity. There had to be a real separation. I had to live by myself. To go through the trials alone. To listen slowly to what was concealed.

(An amazing example of the layers of memory and forgetting was revealed to me as I wrote *The Name*. The only detail I borrowed in the novel from things I had heard from Mother was a story of the heroism of a woman who succeeded in escaping from Auschwitz-Birkenau, and when she was caught and taken to the Appelplatz, she managed to commit suicide. I also borrowed the admiring tone in which Mother spoke of the event. (Only later did I discover how it had served her as a model.) I created a biographical-fictional character, a virtuoso pianist, and invented a name for her—Mala—immortalized in the name of the heroine, Amalia. Years later, as I was finishing the book, I came across a written description of the event in Birkenau and discovered that the name of the woman was the same as the name I had "invented," "Mala"—Mala Zimetbaum.)

Then came the move to Europe, to Paris. To study for the doctorate and to write literature intensively. I went to the Paris of culture, of Rilke, of Proust, of Edith Piaf. But in '72, soon after I arrived, the film *The Sorrow and the Pity* by Marcel Ophuls was released. When the screening ended in the cinema on the Champs-Élysées, I emerged into a different Paris, into a place where that mythical war had gone on. "I understood" that here, on Rue de Rivoli, beneath my garret room, German tanks had passed (ever since then they began to inhabit my dreams); "I understood" that the description of the French as a nation of bold underground fighters and rescuers of Jews—a notion I had grown up with in the years of the military pact between Israel and de Gaulle's France—was very far from reality. The clear, comforting borders between good and bad were shattered for me, and so were the simple moral judgments mobilized for ideologies. Here, far from a post-Six-Day War Israel secure in her power, far from the official versions of Holocaust and heroism, a different time was in the streets, a time not completely cut off from the war years. Here, for the first time I experienced the sense of

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the other. As a Jew, as an Israeli. Wary of revealing my identity at the university that served as a center of *Fatah* activities, trembling in the *Métro* once as I read the Israeli newspaper, *Ma'ariv,* until someone called it to my attention: *"Mademoiselle,* somebody spat on your jacket."

Distance also allowed a different discourse with my parents, especially with Mother. In the weekly letters, without the daily tension of life at home, a new bond was formed, between people who were close, who were beginning to speak more openly with one another. Even my clothes in the European winter, in the "retro" style, began to look like the clothes in Mother's old pictures from Poland, like her hairdo in the photo next to the jeep from Hanover, when she served after the war as a commander in Aliyah B, the *Brikha,* camouflaged in an UNRRA uniform. Poland, Hanover, suddenly turned into places that were much closer, more present than the little state on the shores of the Mediterranean.

On the first Holocaust Memorial Day in Paris, I decided to stay in my apartment all day and to cut myself off from the street that lived by its own dates (for example, Armistice Day of World War I, the "Great War" that took place at the same time of the year). I spent the day reading works on the sources of Nazism, on the roots of anti-Semitism, on the German nationalism of Wagner (rehearsals of whose *Parsifal* I had attended at the Paris Opera).

That summer, on a tour of Europe, an accident forced me to stay unexpectedly in Munich for three weeks. And then the blank spot that filled the heart of the European map for me—Germany—the blank, untouchable spot that sucked up all the evil, also fell. Here, next to the beer hall of "the Nazi buds," where some Israelis had taken me, in what was obviously a sick gesture, there was also an opera, where Mozart was performed, and there were wonderful museums, and parks.

The forced stay in Germany and the Yom Kippur War the following autumn, which I spent in Paris facing the brightly lit Champs-Élysées while my dear ones were in mortal danger, proved to me that there is no refuge in the soothing distinctions between "then" and "now," between "there" and "here." And I also understood that there is no racial difference, imprinted at birth between "them" and "us," nor can we hide behind the fences of the Chosen People. And that, in every person, the murderer and the victim potentially exist, blended into one another, constantly demanding separation, every single day, with full awareness. I understood that I could no longer hide behind the collective, ready-made definitions of memory. That there would be no choice but to embark on the journey that is obstinate, lonely, and full of contradictions.

Germany, France, Europe. What is in that culture, in its roots, mixed with the gold of the baroque and the flickering brasses of symphonies; what

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is in the squares, in the churches, in the ideologies that allowed what happened? Prepared it? Didn't prevent it? What inflamed the hatred? What repressed it under pious words of morality? What fostered it in the heart of religious belief? What prepared it in the tales of God that man told himself to justify the outbursts of his evil instincts under the disguise of *Imitatio Dei?*

And what still exists right before my eyes? Keeps on happening?

How to draw the borders between good and bad with a thin scalpel under a microscope? How to distinguish anew, here and now? All the time?

And what is the terrorizing persuasive force of tales and of their metamorphoses into theologies, ideologies? How to struggle with forgetting, with denial, without whitewashing, but also without reiterating the same stories, without inflaming the same evil instincts? How to tell responsibly?

Jarring questions that filled me, that nourished my research, my theatrical productions, my literary writing, but did not yet touch Mother's hidden place.

I spent the summer of '75 between Princeton and New York, collecting material for my doctorate, reading the works of Rebbe Nahman of Bratzlav in the old JTS library, and in the evenings, swallowing the plethora of fringe theater, jazz and transvestite clubs, and the international bohemian life of Manhattan. And thus I met that young violinist from Kraków who had fled Poland, and was working as a cabdriver. A handsome young man from Kraków. Kraków? A place where people live?! The summer romance was a way to confront the profound seduction of the depths of the past stamped in me, as well as the depths of my femininity.

One day that summer, my aunt, Mother's sister-in-law, came to my apartment in midtown Manhattan. I knew her vaguely from a visit she had made to Israel years before, and after the death of Aunt Tonka in Tel Aviv, my aunt from Queens, the widow of Mother's second brother, who perished in the camps, was her last living close relative. She had survived Auschwitz and her young son was hidden by a Christian woman. After the war, my aunt and her son emigrated to New York.

That day, on the balcony on the thirtieth floor, facing the roofs of midtown Manhattan, my aunt spoke in broken English only about "then" and "there," as if here and now didn't exist, as if we had never left there. She and the Polish pop music at night melted the last wall of resistance. Now I had no excuse not to translate my preoccupation with the subject into action, no excuse not to go to Poland.

In late October, after the administrative alibi was concocted in Paris, I left. Ready. And not ready at all.

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I was not ready for what I would find or for what I wouldn't find. I was not ready for the fear. The fear of returning to the strange hotel room at night, the primal fear that I would starve to death, which impelled me to eat nonstop, completely violating the rules of *Kashrut* which I had observed ever since I came to Paris to study, eating with the dispensation "allowed during an emergency," that I granted myself (insolently?). Not ready for the fear that rushed me in a panic straight from the visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau to meetings with Polish artists and bohemian parties. I was especially not ready for the complexity of my responses, for their force. For what was revealed to me in "the living laboratory" I had poured by myself. The contradictory burst of fascination and revulsion, alienation and belonging, shame and vengeance, of helplessness, of complete denial. . . .

When I returned, the letter to my parents was a first attempt to look at what was revealed, to talk. The restrained language of the letter reflects the difficulty of going beyond the taboo, hoping they would understand through the silence. That different, new discourse with my parents accompanied us throughout the years until their death. A discourse of closeness, of belonging, of acceptance, beyond the generational differences.

The sense of belonging—along with my parents—to the "other, Jewish story" revealed in the depths of the journey only intensified in the following years, as the doors to the centers of European culture opened to me, as I devoted myself to writing. But at the same time, the understanding that it is impossible to go on telling as if nothing had happened also grew. Understanding that, after Auschwitz, there are no more stories that do not betray, there are no more innocent stories.

And what about Mother's shrouded "story"? Details continued to join together in fragments. For years, here and there, she mentioned events, some in conversations with me, some in conversations with others which I chanced upon. I listened when she spoke, and she spoke little. Never did I "interview" her; never did I ask. I respected her way of speaking, as well as her way of being silent. Even after I returned from Auschwitz, I didn't think she had to report or that I had to (or could) "know." I learned from her the lesson of telling in silence.

I heard the first fragment of a chronological description from my mother under extraordinary circumstances. In the autumn of 1977, she was summoned to give testimony in a German court in Hanover. I accompanied my parents to the trial, sitting with Father in the gallery and seeing Mother, with her special erect posture, surrounded by the black robes of the attorneys. In her fluent German, she described the Plaszów camp,

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where Jews from the Kraków Ghetto were removed; she pointed authoritatively at the maps. Her voice trembled only a moment when she came to the description of the *Kinderheim,* the children's home in Plaszów, where children were taken from their parents. In a few words, she dealt with the *Aktsia,* told how all the inmates of the camp were taken out to the square while an orchestra played lullabies, to see how the SS loaded the children onto the trucks that took them to the gas chambers. She was asked what was the name of her son, and how old he was at the time of the *Aktsia.* She replied with an effort, "Marek. Eight years old." The prosecutor asked for a momentary recess, and then the questions resumed. (That prosecutor accompanied us when we left, apologizing in shame for the accused, the deputy of Emon Gantt, the commander of Plaszów, who was absent from the courtroom "for medical reasons. . . .")

A few years later, Mother tried to dramatize the story of the revolt of the women in Kraków at the vocational high school where she taught, wanting to bring the subject close to her women students. She worked with Father on the script and developed original ideas of staging designed to increase audience participation. But, during the rehearsals, she developed such a serious skin disease, clearly as a reaction, that the doctor advised her to stop the production.

The presence of the Holocaust receded completely in her last months, as she struggled with the fatal cancer that was discovered in her. Death was too close to think about its old dread—at any rate, that was my feeling as I stood at her side, admiring her yearning for life, the audacity, the amazing black humor, which restored the dimensions of human absurdity even in the most difficult situations. The day before she lost consciousness, she spoke a lot, in a stupor, in Polish. What did she say? Was she still living there? I couldn't go with her. I remained alone, at her bedside. Then, as I was massaging her feet, those feet that had marched in the death march through frozen Europe, I was struck with the simple knowledge that it was to Mother's struggle, there, that I owed my birth.

I heard Mother's "story" only after her death—death that always turns a loved one into a "story" with a beginning and an end. During the *Shiva,* Rivka Horowitz came to Jerusalem from Bnei-Brak. A woman with bold blue eyes, whom I knew only by name. She was one of nine women, all of them graduates of Beit Yakov, the ultra-orthodox school for girls in Kraków, whom my mother joined in the ghetto, despite differences of education and ideology. The ten women, "The *Minyan,*" supported one another in the ghetto, during the years in the Plaszów camp, in Auschwitz-Birkenau, throughout the death march, and in the final weeks in Bergen-Belsen. For three years, they hadn't abandoned one another;

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together they fought exhaustion and disease, lived through the selections, until all of them survived. "There was strength in them. Moral strength," Mother explained when she and Father, both of them members of the liberal secular *Mapai,* assiduously attended the celebrations of the friends in Bnei Brak. At the *Shiva,* I heard from Rivka Horowitz for the first time about that period. She spoke for a few hours—out of a responsibility to tell me—and left. And after that, we didn't meet again. Later on, when I was almost finished writing *The Name* (and after Mother's death, it seemed to me that, more than ever, the novel spoke of a "there" that was lost forever), came the first information about the family property in Kraków. Apartment houses, a button factory. . . .Property? There? "In the regions of delusion?" And then, the name that had been common at home, Schindler, which suddenly became a book and then a film, and turned into a general legacy the story of the rescue of Mother's cousin and his wife, Mother's refusal to join the list of workers in the enamel factory in order to stay with Marek.

And then, one evening, the telephone rings in Jerusalem, and on the other end of the line, in English with a thick Polish accent, another member of that *"Minyan"* introduces herself, Pearl Benisch, who published a book in 1991, *To Vanquish the Dragon,* with the full story of the group (from the author's religious perspective). A copy arrived on Friday. On the Sabbath eve, I sat with my two little daughters in the living room and picked up the book. I leafed through it distractedly, until I came to the description of the destruction of the *Kinderheim.* And then I fled to the other room so the children wouldn't see me, and there I burst into sobs I didn't know were hidden inside me. A weeping that arose from there. Mine? Hers?

Until dawn that Sabbath, I read for the first time the story of Mother, in chronological order, dated, revealing the few facts I knew situated in their context. Even the description of the goggle-moggle with sugar that she had secretly made for Marek in the sewing workshop, where the women from Plaszów worked, smuggling the treat to the child when she came back. And how one day the Jewish supervisor discovered her stealing the egg, and threatened to turn her in. And how she stood before him then in mortal danger, and accused him in front of all the workers of the sewing shop of being a traitor to his people. I read how in the *Aktsia* of the destruction of the children's home, against the horrifying background of lullabies, Mother burst into the square toward the SS men who were pushing the weeping children onto the trucks. She shouted to them to take her with the child. And how her friends, the women of the *Minyan,* held her with all their might, pulled her back. I read about the sisterhood between the women in the group, about the pride, the unbelievable humor,

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how with astonishing freedom they maintained their humanity in the *Lagers* of Auschwitz-Birkenau. They and many other women and men were described in their humanity facing the crematoria. How they succeeded in putting on makeup to get through the selections, how they sneaked the weak women out of the line of the condemned, how they secretly lit candles at Hanukkah and held a Passover Seder, and how, after the death march from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen, they still managed to laugh together when they got the wrong size prison uniforms. I read, frozen stiff, how, in Bergen-Belsen, Mother dared to be insolent to the female SS officer with the pride she still had left, surviving the public whipping, which few survived, without shouting, "so as not to give the SS the pleasure." Between the pages, the figure of Mother returned to me, cheering the women in Auschwitz with stories of her visit to the Land of Israel, singing them songs of the homeland on their muddy beds, where they fell exhausted with typhus and teeming with lice, in Bergen-Belsen. Suddenly I understood one of the few stories Mother had told me about the camps, how she would sing to herself Tchernihovsky's poem: "You may laugh, laugh at the dreams, I the dreamer am telling you, I believe in Man, and in his spirit, his powerful spirit," emphasizing with her off-key voice the words: "I believe in Man, and in his spirit, his powerful spirit. . . ."

Mother's "story." Discovering it in the heart of the journey to what was stamped inside me. Discovering it now in the middle of life, when I myself am a mother, and older than she—the young woman and mother who was there.

"Mother's story," or maybe only milestones around what will remain hidden.

Letter from the Regions of Delusion

November 2, 1975, Paris

My dears,

Back home—what a relief!

A week in Poland is like a year, like years, like a moment. Ever since the visa was approved, a week before the trip, I felt as if I were facing an operation. I was waiting for something to stop me, for an iron curtain to block the way. And even in the dark, when the bus took us from the plane to the airport in Warsaw, I still didn't believe that the distance between me and Poland would be swallowed up just like that, in a few steps.

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Your letter, which reached me just before the trip, was a lifeline in moments when the dizziness intensified; in moments when there was only a definite absence of my imaginary picture of those places, when instead, there were only the long lines in gray raincoats; in moments of awful loneliness, when there was no one to shout at; in moments when I didn't believe I could finally get on the train and leave that madness behind.

How to tell, and wasn't there any chronology? How to live that over again?

Wroclaw. A dreary city and a theater festival. I was ejected into the darkness in the heart of an empty field. That's how it began. Night in the hotel. An enormous radio, and voices from Russian, Polish, Czech, and Hungarian stations. Stifling heat from the furnace, the chambermaid, a blond Gentile woman, fills the bathtub for me. In the soap box and in the closet are roaches. A strife-torn night in dreams and a grayish morning. The outside was stopped by the curtains. Crowds of people with rubbed-out faces. A few old cars. Awful cold. Fog.

How to leave the room and go into that reality? How to be a "tourist" in it?

Wroclaw. In the display windows rows of laundry soap in coarse packages. Cooperative restaurants smelling of cabbage and sweat. In the festival offices full ashtrays, organizers with sleepless faces. And then a writers' café, in Kosciuszko Square, and it was as if I had come to a kind of Jerusalem before I was born, from the thirties, a Jerusalem I lived from books. With that blend of provincialism and culture. Waitresses dressed in black with starched aprons, newspapers in wooden frames, cigarette smoke, grave discussions about art, literature, politics, metaphysics. The soft tones of a language that is so familiar, so close. The intonations, the gestures, the excited seriousness.

An international festival—a few days of devotion to joy, before the regime returns to its everyday gray.

And I, a stranger at the celebration. Only an "alibi" for another mission, which no one in fact has assigned to me. Yes, a few addresses for it's impossible-not-to-accept-with-a-letter-to-take before setting out. Backs of houses, yards, covered with trash and rubble. Staircase supported by boards. Number 72, apartment 9A. Two old people in the doorway. A kitchen black with soot. Examining me, the letter, with a scared look.

Sneaking back to the ongoing celebration. Just so they won't find out. It's only because of sloppiness that they haven't yet arrested me.

And then, early one misty morning, wrapped in a coat, at the railroad station. Among hundreds of people in a line. Buying a ticket to Kraków with black market Zlotys. . .to the regions of my real trip.

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Getting off the train, and simply walking into the light-flooded square, among ancient buildings, whose carved façades are sparkling in the sun. Walking among the other people on the boulevard with the autumn chestnut trees, on Planty, Mother's route to the tennis courts. Leaves struggle on my shoes. Entering the Rynek Square resounding around itself. The Renaissance arches, the Sukiennice market in the middle like an island in the heart of a lagoon of light, the breeze rising from the Virgin Mary Church. . . .all those names, with a soft *r*, as I ("wonderful child!": the only two words I understood in the foreign language) would accompany Mother to the nightly suppers on an aunt's balcony, with a smell of down comforters and the saltiness of the sea air on hot Tel Aviv nights, when friends from "there" would gather. All those names, when the conversation would climb in the foreign tremolo, and in the café downstairs, in the yard of the building, the cards would be shuffled on tables. The places frozen in slides on the wall of the high school, in commemorations held with a sudden frenzy. Places that were stopped in the thirties, with an amazed look of some Jew who came on the camera by mistake. . . .The warm-cool air caresses the fur of my coat, my face, moves the parasols over the flower vendors' booths.

The road rises to a high hill overlooking the city and the Vistula River. Above, the Wawel Castle covered in ivy burning with autumn leaves. And here, on the slope, along the banks of the Vistula, the way to Paulinska Street, Mother's street.

The three o'clock twilight lingers and softens. Mothers with babies in buggies at the river. (Mothers and babies? Still? Here?) Paulinska Street. On the secret side of the street the wall of a convent, and behind it fruit trees. Someone passes by on the corner. A woman in a heavy coat and old boots. Number eight. The staircase floored with blue tiles. A list of tenants in fountain pen. First floor on the left—a strange name. The door is locked. On the first floor a balcony. Closed glass doors, covered with lace curtains.

To throw a stone at them mischievously, a schoolbag on the back and stockings stretched up to the knee? As I walked there, dressed carefully by Mother, among the children giggling at my different clothes. To sit down at a steaming lunch, close to the breath of forefathers I never saw? Only crumbs of medicines and old lipsticks in the drawers of the aunt who died. That silence. The quiet of houses. Take a picture? A picture of air? Quiet. Across the street, in the convent garden, a bell rings. Children pour out of the gates of the school, climb on the fences, chew on apples.

Spotted façades and the street spins. Not far from there, Kazimierz, the Jewish quarter. The soot of trams on the doorsills of the houses. In the windows of the reform synagogue, the "Temple," spiderwebs, and in the yard, a tangle of weeds. In the alley of one of the houses is a blurred sign

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in Yiddish, "Prayer House." The big synagogue is empty and whitewashed. Turned into a museum. Only a guard passes by like a shadow along the walls, and two fragments of tiles from back then are embedded in the entrance.

It's late now. I wander along the track to the cemetery. Here at least I am sent by permission, to an address that does exist, to the graves of the family. The gate is closed. There is no one to ask. Everything is closed.

An evening full of mist. Suddenly the trams are hurrying. The voices of the flower vendors in the Rynek are swallowed up in the fog. To go to the reserved hotel? In Kraków? Like going to a hotel in Tel Aviv instead of returning home. The desk clerk scurries up to help: "Yes, of course, Madam, here's the bus schedule to Auschwitz. From the town of Oswiecim, you have to go on foot a bit."

On the table at the entrance are old newspapers. Two elderly lady tourists are interested in a jazz festival that may not take place.

And there, at the foot of the stairs, on the way to the room, the movement that had swept me up ever since early morning stops. No, just not to return alone to the gigantic radio in the strange room! I buttoned the coat and went out in pursuit of a dubious rumor that was given to me. Slawskowska Street. Maybe. . . .

And indeed, in the dark, in Yiddish, among the artisans' signs, a small address: "Mordechai Gvirtig Culture Club." A door at the edge of a yard. A doorman sits at the entrance. And in the depths, in the gloom, a few frozen figures are playing cards, gazing vacantly behind the wooden frames of newspapers. "Israel!" the doorman sits up straight, leads me with sudden importance to the "board" room. Five wrinkled faces rise up to me: "Israel!" They sit me down in the middle, following my efforts in a mixture of basic German, a few words in Yiddish, and gestures. They nod at length in deep wonder at every word, assault one another in noisy arguments. Finally, they answer together, in a strange chorus: "Ha! Yes, Poser's daughter! Poser and Abeles," they nod: "Buttons, buttons!" "Yes, buttons," I affirm; "a button factory." "The Hebrew high school," I continue. "Yes, the high school. Now a Polish technical school." The Christian cook serves me a sandwich with a lot of bread and a cup of tea. They dismiss her with the superiority of a bygone age, and urge me: "Eat, eat." For a moment, they go back to their business. The "chairman" is dictating a petition to the "secretary" about the cultural situation. To whom? On behalf of whom? Still? Like those stencilled pages in cellars and photographs of pale-faced choirs that were presented every Holocaust Memorial Day in the glass cabinets of the school. I attempt to explain; they will certainly understand that it's impossible to get on the bus and simply ask the driver in a foreign language to tell me where

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to get off for Auschwitz. They certainly have their own ways of getting there. And indeed, it turns out that tomorrow, a "delegation of rabbis from America" is about to come, and they will go in a special bus. When will they arrive? When will they go? Where are they now? Impossible to know. Got to wait.

I want to sneak away from them now, back to the big square. To go into an anonymous café with drunkards. To be swallowed up there. But they hang onto me, wrapped up in their coats, accompany me to the hotel. Argue with outbursts of rancor, finally declare that the "secretary" will come to "guide me" tomorrow morning. They all press around, shake my hand. Downtrodden faces. So small. In threadbare coats.

In the room the suitcase is waiting, with a few things. Makeup, passport. Will have to go on and move it. Impossible to hide in the suffocation under the blanket.

The next morning, before I have time to ponder the other world in my dreams, the "secretary" is already here, dragging me with a soft-limbed domination. Turning me around in dark streets, getting on and off trams, talking incessantly in the incomprehensible language, as if to herself. And I plod behind her, bending down to her, making an effort.

In Kazimierz, on the bench across from the synagogue, the doorman of the "Mordechai Gvirtig Culture Club" and two old men are already waiting for me. It's not clear if they're beggars or rabbis. They came to welcome the "American delegation." The doorman waving as he approaches, "Yes, yes!" One of the old men hurries me, opens the gates of the ancient synagogue of Rabbi Moshe Isserlish. For a minute, a separate hush. The figures that follow in my wake remain beyond the fence. A small building whose heavy walls are leaning, and a white courtyard. Inside the synagogue, there is still a warmth among the wooden benches, around the Ark of the Covenant. On the tables are old prayer books. Black letters. And in the small enclosure crows land on the ancient tombstones sunk in mist. For a moment the past seems to continue with all its softness, without any obstacle, in that distant murmur, up to the morning covered with mist, to me.

And the doorman is already rushing me hysterically; he arranged with the gatekeeper of the Miodowa cemetery to be there, to open the gate. Hurry, hurry, got to get back in time for the "delegation of rabbis!" And thus, in single file, the doorman limping, the muscular Christian gatekeeper on his heels, and I behind them, we march between long rows of sunken, shattered gravestones, covered with mold. Names, names. I recite to them the names I've managed to dredge up from my memory, "Poser, Mendel, Groner." Tombstones in long rows whose edges vanish in mist and piles of fallen leaves. Many strange names. Don't find. A Christian woman with legs swathed in bandages rinses the graves with boiling water,

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raises her head wrapped in a turban to us: "Yes, Groner, saw it once. . .maybe there." I still hold on, persist in reading the names, seeking under piles of leaves. But the limping doorman and the gatekeeper behind him are already hurrying out. We didn't find. No maps. No books. No witnesses. Mission impossible. Only a delusion of a mission. And time is limited.

Meanwhile on the bench the number of idlers and "rabbis" waiting for the "American delegation" has grown. According to the doorman, they are already in Kraków and will arrive very soon. Maybe you can find out in the hotel when they'll arrive? No, impossible to know. I break away from the doorman, tell him I'll come back in a little while, he should beg the rabbis of the delegation to wait, and I hurry to Wawel Castle, for the visit that was arranged. On the streets people in gray coats, buses, trams. You can even eat an apple. The body goes on functioning over the abyss between the worlds. And when I come back from the royal palace, from the halls with waxed floors whose walls are covered with embroidered tapestries of feast and forest, devoured by torments of treason, I run down the slope carpeted with fallen leaves, back to Kazimierz, to my Jews. From the end of the street, the doorman stumbles toward me. He drops his hands in a gesture of dismissal: "Well, the American delegation. . .a call came that they didn't leave America. Well, the fog, they didn't leave America."

Empty. No one there. Even the idlers who were waiting on the bench have gone home.

Entrusted with the last mission, the doorman rushes me into the community organization offices. Second floor, a smell of boiled potatoes, a few old people with tin plates and spoons. Even the bright light filtering from the shutters doesn't bring the scene in the room any closer. Around an enormous table sit the activists of the "congregation," their chins leaning on their hands, and their crutches leaning on the chairs. A few old portraits on the walls. At the head of the table, Mr. Jacobovitch, an irascible Jew, head of the community organization. The mutual curiosity dies out after a few sentences, and after I am given the travel arrangements, I slip out impolitely. I also flee from the kosher meal of mashed potatoes on a tin plate and the ritual washing of the hands in a stained sink, to Sukiennice Square, to the light, to the fancy café with red velvet chairs and torte powdered like the cheeks of the Polish women. Here you can shout aloud that maybe everything is a delusion, that maybe there never were Jews here.

And it was as if a shout burst out of me in the evening, at the performance of "The Night of November Ninth" by Wyspianski, directed by Swinarski. Mythic characters singing against a background of a burning horizon. The tricolored flag of the revolution waves over the stage, and the audience is galvanized. A moment of naked yearning for freedom is revealed, of metaphysical emotion, a moment of a personal world despite

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the constant oppression. Something so familiar, so close in temperament, in gestures. Such belonging. Belonging?

An old car. The shaved nape of the driver's neck stuck in a cap. Poplar trees, autumn fields. I am in the back seat, huddled in my coat. On the way to Auschwitz.

And perhaps you should be silent about that trip. Not talk about the yellow flowers, the gravel in the sun, the chatter of the Polish cleaning women who laughingly point out to me that my trousers are unstitched. My trousers? On what side of the barricade?

How to write you about the heavy marching in an attempt to grasp something through the remnants of constructions—as from archaeological digs of thirty, not two thousand years ago. To understand the chasm separating sanity and madness with barbed-wire fences. The house beyond the fence, half a mile away, was always there, with the same smoke in the chimney and the same geranium pots behind the curtains. And here?

How to write about the dark steps with a group of Polish high school students on them. The wall of liquidations between two blocs. A barred window. A few fallen leaves scattered on the sill. Expressionless walls in the gas chambers, the iron doors of the ovens. Polish sky. Between the chambers, in the corridors, photographs and numbers. Printed columns of names. And the silence of another morning, now. As when I held my breath, a girl of six or seven, in the schoolyard for a whole minute, through the whole siren, so that I'd be dizzy when I intoned the words, *six million.*

How to write you about the forced march through the tremendous extents of Birkenau Camp. About the dampness still standing in the abandoned blocs, between those three-tiered wooden bunks, and the straw sacks on the dirt floor. How to imagine Mother within that silent madness. Mother. A shaved head in nights of hallucinations, nights among packed bodies. How to put Mother into one of the gigantic photos placed along the railroad track. How to force myself to imagine her in this emptiness?

Polish earth. Small autumn flowers. The driver waits. Dozes in the sun in the car.

And maybe all the questions are not right. For it's impossible to understand. Not even at the end of the journey to this stage set. Impossible to understand without the fear of death that catches the breath, without the palpable threat on the flesh. Impossible to grasp death from all the hundreds of photos. Maybe only the heaps of empty shoes are still hovering between life and death. There I finally recited the *Kaddish. Kaddish* over heaps of shoes.

And maybe all the questions start only after the shoes also crumble. Beyond the crazy stage set of death, which will always remain incomprehensible. And maybe all the questions begin only with the silent

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emptinesses of now. How to go on living in a world that has turned into the enemy. With the fear stamped in the blood. With the constant paranoia. "*Arbeit macht frei*." How to live within the world and outside it. In the flow of its life and in the flow of other life and eternity. How to go on nevertheless believing in man, how to take the beloved head in the arms.

In the afternoon light, trivial thoughts pass through the head. Impossible to pretend suffering; that would be hypocrisy. Impossible to go back to the past—clinging or accusing—that would be the triumph of the past. There is no escape from the constant questions to be asked now, impossible to flee from them to the images frozen in the photos.

And in Warsaw, in the Ghetto, there aren't even any ruins where the imagination can take hold for a moment. There are no stones that are emitted outside of time. Only concrete blocks built a few feet above the ground, above the ruins and the mounds of corpses that weren't even cleared away. To hold your head in your hands and shout. Life goes on. Cars in parking lots, a few poplar trees on the sidewalks. And that emptiness. Only the lip service of a memorial with the pathos of socialist realism, and a Jewish museum behind the building of the Communist party. The director of the museum and his secretary, two Jews with bowed heads, show me a building excavation out the window. "Here was the great synagogue of Warsaw." And the cleaning woman smiles like an accomplice in a crime, points at the exit to the guest book full of emotional comments. Gray cement boulevards and gigantic statues of soldiers with forged chins. Impossible to believe that there was once a different life here. Only in the nationalized *Desa* stores are scores of Jewish objects. Hanukkah lamps, synagogue menorahs, spice boxes. Objects with price tags. No, there is nowhere to return. The whole thing is only a delusion. Deceptions of the imagination. In my head, crushed fragments of all the artistic creations resound, the assemblies, the recitations that tried to convey the other reality to me, and they only increase the distance.

The rain doesn't let up. An awful cold penetrates the clothes, makes you shiver. Warsaw—a gray horizon by day, and gray in the pale neon lights at night. The trip back seems like an illusion, like opening the camp gate and being outside. The unbearable loneliness, the unrelenting stifling.

Only the friendship of my acquaintances, Polish theater people, supports me in the hours before the departure. Figures between reality and dream. Alicia in her theatrical clothes, waving her hands like a Chekhov character. And Andrzej with ironical humor, in fragments of literary French, with the credo from Communism to the surrealism of Witkiewicz. Fervent confessions in small apartments, when tomorrow is unknown, and only the dream is left. Like the awakening appreciation for Bruno Schulz, thirty years after he perished, like worshipping the theater,

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the word spoken from the stage, received with a sigh. Like the clandestine grasping of Catholicism.

Childhood memories extend between Mediterranean summers and alleys in northern cities, woven in the dreams of Polish romantic literary heroes, shrouded in the sounds of the language, and open accounts of the blood of the dead. Life in a pre-time is always present, in the double look at all the places. Always through the other place I belong to, where you don't come on journeys. A wiped-out place, condemned to delusion, where I will never be able to rest the wandering of existences.

With relief, I finally board the train. Sleeping cars that came from Moscow with a conductor in an undershirt and a stifling of sweat and orange peels. A twenty-four-hour trip to Paris, like a day of fasting. To another world? At midnight, the train passes the East Berlin station. Signs in Gothic script: "Welcome to the Democratic Capital." On the platform is a white line three feet from the cars. Soldiers in riding boots with German shepherds and submachine guns are standing at regular intervals. A patrol of two soldiers goes through the train. Another patrol checks between the wheels with flashlights, and another one marches on the roofs of the cars. Maybe someone has succeeded in escaping. A white line, soldiers, and a train. Only the site of madness or freedom has changed.

Back in Paris. The clear sky, department-store advertising instead of propaganda slogans. Quiet. The silence of the room. And that drawn orbit of life where you two are so close at hand. "Flesh of my flesh."

Beloved father and mother, I press you to my heart, and once again am gathered in your arms.

Translated from the Hebrew by Barbara Harshav

WE MOURN THE PASSING OF

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A LONG-TERM MEMBER
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MARK HARMAN

"At least he could garden": Beckett and Kafka

In post-war Paris Beckett was still struggling to step out of Joyce's shadow. Unfortunately for him, Kafka was all the rage, so much so that the popularity of the Prague writer was interfering with the reception of the great Joyce himself. Even in Dublin, as Beckett sadly informed Joyce, intellectuals were too busy reading Kafka to show a belated interest in *Ulysses*. So Beckett went on the offensive to prevent his being perceived as a Kafka epigone. His comments about Kafka in the *New York Times* give off a whiff of the anxiety of influence while also revealing just how insightful he could be about his Prague rival:

> I've only read Kafka in German—serious reading. . .only *The Castle* in German. I must say it was difficult to get to the end. The Kafka hero has a coherence of purpose. He's lost but he's not spiritually precarious, he's not falling to bits. My people seem to be falling to bits. Another difference. You notice how Kafka's form is classic. It goes on like a steamroller—almost serene. It *seems* to be threatened the whole time—but the consternation is in the form. In my work there is consternation behind the form, not in the form.

Beckett's remark that he found it difficult to get to the end of *The Castle*—a phenomenon not entirely unknown among readers of Beckett—doesn't quite square with his acute perception that Kafka's form goes on "like a steamroller." With that simile Beckett captures a key feature of Kafka's prose—its relentlessness—a stylistic trait that had passed unremarked in the voluminous discussions of *The Castle* by German-language writers and critics. Beckett was the first to note the odd discrepancy in Kafka's third and final novel between the lack of action—the hero K. goes round and round in circles and never penetrates through to the mysterious Castle—and the relentless momentum of the language itself which presses on and on in a manner that anticipates Beckett's own version of the steamroller effect in his *Molloy* trilogy. Sometimes it takes an outsider with the linguistic discernment of a Beckett to spot essential characteristics of foreign masterworks.

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Beckett's astuteness about *The Castle* is all the more remarkable given that he was reading the original in the edition of Kafka's friend and first editor Max Brod. Brod normalized Kafka's punctuation and made other significant changes—roughly two per page. Malcolm Pasley's 1982 German critical edition, on which my 1998 translation is based, restores the loosely punctuated sentences and the breathless effect of Kafka's seemingly never-ending paragraphs, which do not separate out the dialogue from the narrative and thus create a rush of language.

There is no doubt that Beckett's reading of *The Castle* left discernible traces in his last English-language novel *Watt*, as the Beckett scholar Ruby Cohn has convincingly shown. Klamm, a remote Castle official, inspired Beckett's portrayal of the equally elusive Knott—forefather of the vaguely God-like Youdi in Beckett's *Molloy* and, ultimately, of Godot himself. By a piquant coincidence, one of Kafka's original chapter headings, not included by Max Brod in his editions but restored in my translation, was "Das Warten auf Klamm," or "Waiting for Klamm."

Kafka began writing *The Castle* in the first person—a mode more characteristic of Beckett than of Kafka. In the beginning there was no K., only an I. In the course of penning the third chapter Kafka went back and replaced all the *I*s with *K*.s. The traces left by these first-person origins accentuate the sensation that we are stuck inside K.'s head, eavesdropping on his obsessive thoughts.

In the final, unfinished chapter a barmaid called Pepi invites K. to come live with her and two other girls. The ensuing exchange suggests a climactic as well as temporal stasis that points forward, beyond Kafka's nameless village and Castle, to Beckett's even more abstract landscapes:

> "So will you come?" "How much longer is it till spring?" asked K. "Till spring?" repeated Pepi, "the winter here is long, a very long winter, and monotonous. But we don't complain about that down here, we're safe from the winter. Of course at some point spring does come and summer too, and they certainly have their day, but in one's memory spring and summer seem short, as if they didn't last much longer than two days, and sometimes even on those days, throughout the most beautiful day, snow falls."

Sex appears to offer K. some relief by giving him access—if only metaphorically—to a strange country where the air is fresh. However, this new air is not so much replenishing as suffocating:

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> Hours passed there, hours breathing together with a single heartbeat, hours in which K. constantly felt he was lost or had wandered farther into foreign lands than any human being before him, so foreign that even the air hadn't a single component of the air in his homeland and where one would inevitably suffocate from the foreignness but where the meaningless enticements were such that one had no alternative but to go on and get even more lost.

Similarly, for Beckett heroes such as Malone in *Malone Dies*, sex is no more than a gateway to a nameless unhappiness:

> Let us think of the hours when, spent, we lie twined together in the dark, our hearts labouring as one, and listen to the wind saying what it is to be abroad, at night, in winter, and what it is to have been what we have been, and sink together, in an unhappiness that has no name.

Kafka's melancholic vision of art and life first emerged in an epiphany that he had as a youth on a hill overlooking Prague:

> Many years ago I sat one day, in a sad enough mood, on the slopes of the Laurenziberg. I went over the wishes that I wanted to realize in life. I found that the most important was to attain a view of life in which life. . .would be recognized. . .as a nothing. . .a dream, a dim hovering. . .somewhat as if one were to hammer together a table with painful and methodical technical efficiency, and simultaneously do nothing at all, and not in such a way that people could say: "Hammering a table together is nothing to him" but rather: "Hammering a table together is really hammering a table together to him, but at the same time it is nothing. . ."

Kafka's conception of art as something and at the same time nothing is remarkably close to the aesthetics of failure that Beckett is already beginning to evolve in the 1930s. In 1937 Beckett speaks of wanting "to bore one hole after another into it [language], until what lurks behind it—be it something or nothing—begins to seep through." His goal in ripping apart the veil of language is "to feel a whisper of that final music or that silence that underlies all."

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Kafka anticipates another central insight of Beckett's when he notes in an aphorism that "a first sign of nascent knowledge is the desire for death." Beckett, too, is, as Christopher Ricks suggests in his witty book *Beckett's Dying Words*, a writer who reveals to us in stark form the fact that at some point, at some level, most of us long for death. Yet Beckett does not entirely banish his characters' fear of death. Like Kafka, he profited from reading Pascal and Schopenhauer, and his characters' obsessive cogitations are merely a distraction—in the Pascalian sense—from death.

Kafka and Beckett are the two great modern connoisseurs of the deathbed scene. Kafka's comments on the relationship between his own attitude toward death and that of his characters are more forthcoming than Beckett's. In the diaries he claims that in staging such deathbed scenes he is deliberately exploiting the discrepancy between the reader's fear of death and his own longing for it: "for me, who believe that I shall be able to lie contentedly on my deathbed, such scenes are secretly a game; indeed, in the death enacted I rejoice in my own death, hence calculatingly exploit the attention that the reader concentrates on death, have a much clearer understanding of it than he, of whom I suppose that he will loudly lament on his deathbed."

By contrast, Beckett's characters claim to be much in love with easeful death. Yet, however much they look forward to their demise, theirs is always a protracted farewell. For instance, in the opening lines of *Malone Dies* the hero announces his imminent departure—"I shall soon be quite dead at last"—only to add "I would not put it past me to pant on to the Transfiguration, not to speak of the Assumption." At one point Malone even concedes that his insouciance about death is an act: "Yes, there is no good pretending, it is hard to leave everything." Yet for the most part he goes on pretending.

In their evasion of the death they ostensibly welcome, Beckett's characters are every bit as obsessive as Kafka's. Malone, for instance, prepares for his demise—which he likes to call his great day—by repeatedly counting his possessions: "I want, when the great day comes, to be in a position to enounce clearly. . .all that its interminable prelude. . .had brought me and left me in the way of chattels personal." And then he adds: "I presume it is an obsession." One would seek vainly in Kafka for a sentence like that. Although Kafka writes about characters who fret as much as Beckett's do, he eschews such explicitly psychological language. True, he kept abreast of the startling developments in Viennese psychology, as is evidenced by his casual comment that while writing his breakthrough story "The Judgment" he had had "thoughts of Freud, naturally." Yet he remained wary of psychoanalysis and even dreamed about writing fiction that would free itself from psychology. By contrast, Beckett, who underwent therapy

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with Wilfred Bion at the Tavistock Clinic in London in the mid-thirties, drew quite consciously on depth psychology, especially in the trilogy.

In Kafka's proto-Beckettian story "The Burrow," the mole-like hero describes in great detail an underground maze it has constructed, partly by smashing its own forehead against the earth. Like so many of Beckett's heroes, the animal is a recluse who keeps doing inventories of his possessions—his prize items being not hats and sticks, as in Beckett, but food stores. Like Josephine the Singer and the Hunger Artist, he is about to disappear. This disappearance will come about when his adversary—around whom his thoughts continuously circle—and he come face to face. Here is how the hero imagines what he may do to his antagonist in the final fight to the death: "I might in my blind rage leap on him, maul him, tear the flesh from his bones, destroy him, drink his blood and fling his corpse among the rest of my spoil." The level of violence here—uncharacteristically strong for Kafka—testifies to the extremity of the predicament in which Kafka's mole-like alter ego is trapped. In real life Kafka was fascinated with moles, which surface repeatedly in his letters, as was Beckett, who once observed of himself: "I am like a mole in a tunnel."

Kafka evidently completed his "Burrow," but the ending was lost. We can only speculate as to whether that missing ending came close to the perfect lament about death that Kafka envisages in his diaries: "my lament is as perfect as can be, nor does it suddenly break off, as is likely to be the case with a real lament, but dies beautifully and purely away." Like "The Burrow" and *The Castle* in the restored text of the critical edition, *Malone Dies* tapers off, with the twin deaths of Malone and his shadowy Ur-self:

> never there he will never
> never anything
> there
> any more

Like many of his characters, Beckett himself occasionally confessed to the feeling that he had never been properly born. Kafka, too, was burdened by the thought that he had never truly lived. He could be speaking of Beckett just as much as of himself when he writes in a letter to Brod, "Such a writer is continually staging a scene: He dies (or rather he does not live) and continually mourns himself. From this springs a terrible fear of death. . .he has a terrible fear of dying because he has not yet lived." Kafka's vision of the twin deaths of his writerly self and of his biographical persona resembles that of Beckett's Malone: "Of course the writer in

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me will die right away, since such a figure has no base, no substance, is less than dust. . . .But I myself cannot go on living because I have not lived, I have remained clay, I have not blown the spark into fire, but only used it to light up my corpse." To readers of Beckett's novels and plays, Kafka's anticipation of his final days may also sound eerily familiar: "From now on I may not go out of Bohemia, next I will be confined to Prague, then to my room, then to my bed, then to a certain position in bed, then to nothing more."

As for Beckett himself, his rivalry with Kafka persisted until the very end. In a letter to a friend in 1983 the already ailing Beckett complains of feeling "inertia and void as never before" and recalls an entry in Kafka's diary: "Gardening. No hope for the future." But Beckett has a trump card up his sleeve. Clearly savoring an opportunity to outdo Kafka's pessimism, he adds wryly: "At least he could garden."

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EDITH KURZWEIL

Freudians and Feminists in *Fin-de-siècle* Vienna

We rarely recall that in Freud's Vienna feminism and psychoanalysis took root in tandem; and that both movements were supported by the progressive forces around them. This is absolutely clear from the early *Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society*, from Harriet Anderson's fascinating *Utopian Feminism: Women's Movements in Fin-de-siècle Vienna*, and from some of the biographies of the women around Freud. Susan Quinn, for instance, reports that Karen Horney sympathized with the Abolitionist movement that flourished in Hamburg in 1901 (it was suppressed by the police a year later and moved to nearby Altona), and with the League for the Protection of [unwed] Mothers—whose "Austrian sister league Freud was attached to" as well. According to Forrester and Appignanesi, Helene Deutsch "channelled her youthful zeal into the workers' movement of social revolution, . . .was passionate about the condition of women, [and] organized the first group of working women in the town [of Przemysl]."

Of course, there also was much resistance to both feminism and psychoanalysis, which for the most part were backed by artists and intellectuals who promoted personal and societal freedom, knowledge, and enlightenment. Inevitably, this very search often propelled its proponents into different directions, and the very establishment of their ensuing activities then set leading feminists apart, and sometimes got them into conflicts that ended up in factionalism. We are aware that this was so among Freud's followers as well—to begin with, when Carl Jung and Alfred Adler set up their own organizations—and over time these factions have multiplied exponentially, whether differences have been primarily over psychoanalytic theory, clinical methods, or metapsychological issues.

As we know, the psychoanalytic process promotes freedom; and this search for freedom interested both men and women in what Freud had to say. In turn, it was thanks to Freud's female patients that he had the opportunity to investigate the connections between psychic wounds and their conversion into physical manifestations—paralysis, neuralgia, amnesia,

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fainting, and so on. In fact, what these women told him made Freud realize that they had become sick because they were unable to give voice to what offended their families, mostly their fathers; that they had to suppress obvious truths in order to get along; and that in their milieu, for the sake of family loyalty and conventions, they had to fool themselves into believing that what they knew were lies.

Still, many middle-class Viennese women did not fool themselves. Instead of malingering, they started feminist movements, such as the Women's Employment Association, the Vienna Women's Club, and the Athenaum, to combat the taken-for-granted chauvinism. Of course, their feminism was not our feminism: they were idealists and were envisioning a new social order. Thus they had to face entrenched conservative pressures that blamed women for every ill of society—for degenerate sexuality and loose morals, for being bad mothers, bad childbearers, and dissatisfied hysterical hermaphrodites. It was assumed that women's rights movements were no more than "organized social envy," and a boon to prostitution parading as high-minded sexual politics.

Most of the women who ended up on Freud's couch did not join any of these feminist crusades. They suffered from what we might call the worst-case scenarios—living in typical Viennese families that took for granted that women were able to deal only with *Kinder, Kirche,* and *Küche.* No matter what their ambitions or daydreams, they were excluded from intellectual and professional activities. The middle- or upper-middle-class women who came to rally around Freud—whatever their theoretical disagreements with him eventually would be—were among those who refused to accept this role. For them, psychoanalysis offered a means to explore their situation in order to change it. They were aware of the push for liberation by artists and writers, and wanted to help build a democratic society. Because they belonged to this liberal climate, they wanted to find out why women were being kept down, and looked for the unconscious, emotional clues that might help them find the courage to fight first for their own emancipation, and then for that of all women. Thus they were in sympathy with the feminist leaders who addressed the inequalities around them head on—inequalities between the rich and the poor, and between the sexes.

Freud's original insight—that his first patient's, Anna O's, symptoms to a large extent were manifestations of societal problems and norms—is at the root of today's misunderstandings of his ideas as well as of his continuing fame. Indeed, all of his early cases were women, because they were the ones who bore the psychological burdens of the existing—and lopsided—social order. Inevitably, Anna O. (Bertha Pappenheim) was only one among many who chafed under the irrational yoke imposed on her. We know that according to her, her analysis was not successful. Nevertheless,

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after her initial recovery she moved first to Karlsruhe and then to Frankfurt, and was involved in a bevy of feminist and welfare activities. Still, current discussions of her story tend to focus on the way Freud handled her therapy, on his insights versus Breuer's, and on issues of hysteria, rather than on the fact that after leaving Freud she was prototypical of the daughters of her class—whose only outlet for their intellect was in social work and feminism. So, when Freud asked Marie Bonaparte, "What do women want?" I would say that they wanted most of all to break out of their cocoons, and that they had good reason to envy their brothers—first as little boys and then as men.

In 1866, the first wave of feminists managed to create the Women's Employment Association, which was meant to engage wayward women (with illegitimate children) and widows in learning a trade that would get them off the dole and allow them to support themselves. Even so, at the beginning of that century, women in Vienna did not yet have the right to vote; girls had been admitted to take *Matura* exams—a requirement for university studies—only since 1896. In 1909 they still could not enter the Faculty of Law—a prerequisite to high-level civil service jobs. If young girls displayed intellectual leanings and joined feminist causes, they were deemed masculine and unmarriageable—in an ambiance where marriage was their only means of support.

None of the many books about *fin-de-siècle* Vienna list the names of the early feminist leaders in their index. Since marriage was women's prescribed career, most women had husbands and saw little reason for change: they were satisfied that they now could take jobs without their husbands' consent and were allowed to vote in local elections. The success of specific causes in one way or another threatened to deprive women of some of the male protection they counted and depended on. Consequently, the majority of women were ambivalent and often opposed the feminists' initiatives. Basically, they were hemmed in by their inherent Catholicism and conservatism, as well as by the proscribed chauvinism, and by their realistic dependence on husbands and/or fathers. About those who did not marry, for instance, the writer Olga Waissnix bitterly remarked to Arthur Schnitzler: "Marriage is prescribed to us as the only profession which can bring us happiness; if we don't find it, *tant pis*, calmly renounce and bear it is the message then. . .that demands a heroism of which not one single man in a thousand would be capable."

The Women's Employment Association nevertheless expanded its mission and eventually trained girls for more than factory work. Its founder, Marianne Hainisch, the wife of a cotton-factory owner and leading member of the League of Austrian Women's Associations, also pushed for welfare for the poor, and for the promotion of women's moral, intellectual,

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and economic development. Moreover, she supported a variety of other feminist initiatives, such as the Art School Association for Women and Girls, the Association for Girls' Support, and the Vienna Association of Housewives. She pressed for the admission of women to grammar school because "woman as the moral educator of her children needs schooling. . .[and because] the most disgraceful injustice is done us at the side of the beloved spouse." Her motto was *equal but different.*

Together with Auguste Fickert, she was a leading member of the League of Austrian Women's Associations *(Bund Österreichischer Frauenvereine).* Fickert, however, had more far-reaching goals. She expected to abolish capitalist exploitation (wage slavery) and personal exploitation (sexual slavery), for which she postulated that women undergo an "inner change. . .[that would] overcome the slave mentality which holds them captive." To that end, women would need both intelligence and morality. Among other things, they would have to become familiar with science; to shed their doll-like existence; become personalities to themselves; and to give politics a new content. Both working-class and middle-class women, she maintained, would have to help social democracy to take hold. But she stated that women could not do this by means of the prevalent norms of self-sacrifice, love and devotion: they were to inspire morality by means of a "political awareness that upsets the prevailing bourgeois masculine order instead of preserving it." Thus both Hainisch and Fickert aimed to infuse society with morals, but Fickert expected first to abolish power relations while Hainisch thought power could be gotten via equal rights.

Another feminist, Rosa Meyreder, was an almost exact contemporary of Freud. An autodidact and admirer of Goethe and Nietzsche who kept up with what Freud published, she was a psychologizing thinker. She agreed with him that culture demands repression of sexuality, but attacked the Oedipus complex, arguing that Oedipus slew his father unknowingly and not from conscious rebellion as a son. Yet she assumed that not all men opposed women's concerns, and did not want women to unite against men, mostly because they would need their backing in order to pass pro-women legislation in Parliament. In fact, many social reformers, university professors, left-wing middle-class intellectuals, and liberals supported the feminists up to a point. Among them were the social psychologist Ernst Mach, the philosopher Friedrich Jodl, the writer Hermann Bahr, the physicist Ludwig Bolzmann, as well as such socialist statesmen as Karl Renner, Otto Bauer, and Victor Adler. However, their open support created a backlash: other men rejected and ridiculed them as liberals, non-Aryans, socialists, and unhappy spouses, as "out to emancipate everything," and as contributing to the "lamentable masculinization of women"—all of which infiltrated the Freudians' debates at their Wednesday meetings.

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Grete Meisel-Hess's focus was on marriage law. Even though she began to push for social measures to help expectant mothers in 1901, maternity insurance was not granted until 1914. She also championed the rights of illegitimate mothers to raise their children, and for such children to be able to inherit from one another. In 1911, together with others, she supported the German League for the Protection of Mothers, which among a variety of things condemned marriages that "merged money and love"—namely of rich middle-aged men to beautiful young girls—in the search for a higher moral order. Meisel-Hess found scientific support in Freud's theories of sexuality, since she believed also that women needed an active sexual life to further physical and mental health. In her words, "every possibility of the inner rebirth of an individual is conditional on his relation to sexuality."

Irma von Troll-Borostyáni was yet another autodidact who herself suffered from the dreary existence to which girls of "good families" were then relegated. In addition to Nietzsche, Goethe, Meister Eckhardt, and Jakob Boehme, she had read Aristotle, Cicero, the Kabbalah, Schopenhauer, Emerson, and Byron. And she didn't want to live "without a goal." After publishing *The Equality of the Sexes and the Reform of the Education of Youth (Die Gleichstellung der Geschlechter und die Reform der Jugenderziehung)* under her real name, she was accused of plagiarizing a man's work, namely August Bebel's *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* which had come out fourteen years earlier. Critics did not believe that women could have independent ideas: they were expected to have inferior minds, able to write romances at best.

I have mentioned only a few of the leading feminists Harriet Anderson writes about in her excellent book. Here, my aim is to call attention to the fact that in Vienna feminist initiatives mushroomed during the same period as Freud "invented" psychoanalysis; and to indicate that the arguments about the role of women among the early Freudians were part of the Zeitgeist. So, whether or not individual feminists would or would not accept the existence of an unconscious was less of an issue in the culture at large than the fact that both movements were threatening the existing order.

Much has been made of Wittels's statement of March 11, 1908, in the *Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society*, that "women bemoan the fact that they did not come into the world as men; [that] they try to become men via the feminist movement; [and that neither] people [nor women themselves] appreciate the perversity and senselessness of these strivings." At the time, Freud apparently had been amused and stimulated by the ensuing responses. Adler's comments were particularly sharp, as these ended up with a Marxist analysis and the dismissal of Wittels's presentation as a fairy tale. However, their differences were based in their personal politics, since

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Adler was an active socialist, and Wittels believed—and stated—that "one cannot be a Freudian and a Social Democrat at the same time." Their animosity surfaced as well when Margarete Hilferding, the wife of the German socialist leader, asked for admission to the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society (in 1910), and Wittels argued vehemently against the formal admission of all women. (You may recall that years later, in 1941, Wittels was behind the ouster of Horney from the New York Psychoanalytic Society—and that the rift between Adler and Freud in 1912, although argued on theoretical grounds, was rooted in this political agenda.)

Indeed, Adler was actively involved in progressive education, and advocated introducing psychoanalytic methods into the Vienna school system. This social democratic initiative as such eventually succeeded, but it watered down what Freud called "the gold of psychoanalysis"—that is, the centrality of the unconscious. (A bit later, Anna Freud's work with children in her clinic had similar aims, as did August Aichhorn's and Siegfried Bernfeld's.) In any event, the very thing that distanced Adler from Freud was attuned to such feminists as Eugenie Schwarzwald, a Jewish woman with a doctorate in German literature from the University of Zurich. She set up a string of progressive private schools, to begin with for girls between ten and sixteen years of age, that would foster "creative education" and spontaneity, cast teachers not as disciplinarians but as friends, and expose pupils to Schwarzwald's wide circle of enlightened artists, writers, and musicians as well.

By then, Bertha Pappenheim had become an active force in many feminist causes. That nowadays she is referred to simply as a social worker must be attributed to the limits then set on women's accomplishments; to the fact that feminism gradually petered out; and that since then both psychoanalysis and social work have become professionalized and for the most part exist in separate realms. How else can we explain the many misconceptions about Freud—as a supporter of patriarchy rather than citizen of his time; as advocating "penis envy" rather than using this as a metaphor for the consequence of women's submissive role; and so on.

That the Freudians did not openly come out in support of feminist causes may well have contributed to most feminists' neglect of psychoanalysis. But during the early part of our century, both Freud's *entourage* and feminists gained from social democratic initiatives. Most of the women who joined Freud's circle had done so primarily because they hoped to learn how psychoanalysis might help liberate women from somatizing their emotional dependence on men. In that sense, both Freudians and feminists were revolutionaries. Since Jews as well had everything to gain by eradicating prejudices, and were eager to attain equality in spheres that still were closed to them, such as holding public office and teaching, we can understand why

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they were so numerous in Vienna's radical movements and Marxist-inspired politics; and why Freudians as well as feminists supported the social democrats' politics in varying degrees. Yes, they differed about how to attain their ends, but, ultimately, they were united in believing that *all* individuals needed to be freed from personal and political shackles. So, even though this feminist movement petered out, it left behind legislation that benefited subsequent generations of women.

As we know, chauvinism was not eradicated then or later on. Mostly, subsequent waves of feminism, especially when taking such formulations as penis envy and castration literally, often without reading Freud, rejected psychoanalysis. But feminists who read carefully expanded on Freud's understanding of the unconscious—by working with patients and especially by learning more about the transference and countertransference in the psychoanalytic session. More recently, many psychoanalytic feminists were influenced by the French followers of Jacques Lacan, whose main emphasis has been on the "language of psychoanalysis," that is, on the structural relation of the words used in their psychoanalytic sessions by both analyst and analysand. However, this is a gross simplification of extremely complex issues which remain in dispute among practicing analysts and scholars, and which frequently are misunderstood in translation—not only of words but of culture. I'm thinking of Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel's and Joyce McDougall's different interpretations of "perversions"—themselves "politically incorrect" formulations in America—and of Julia Kristeva's focus on semiotics. Their theories and clinical methods differ from those of American ego psychologists—although this often tends to be ignored by non-psychoanalysts and the public, as is the fact that there are many ongoing discussions within the American and International Psychoanalytic Associations that transcend theoretical boundaries. In any event, we must keep in mind that in Freud's Vienna as well as in our own time, and in between, feminists always have responded to local knowledge and cultural givens—whether advancing feminist or psychoanalytic aims. As we are only too aware, they still do.

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SETH FORMAN

On Howe, Ellison, and the Black Intellectuals

It must have been hard for critics not to wince when Irving Howe contended in his 1963 essay "Black Boys and Native Sons" that black writers in America had to confront their oppression in order to achieve true authenticity. Insisting that a writer can work only from his own experience, Howe asked "What, then, was the experience of a man with a black skin, what *could* it be in this country? How could a Negro put pen to paper, how could he so much as think or breathe, without some impulsion to protest?" It would be hard to overstate what a bold and gutsy indiscretion Howe committed in writing such prose, particularly because the article, which appeared in *Dissent*, was written when the civil rights movement had reached its famous crescendo, and was exhorting Americans to judge blacks not by the color of their skin but by the "content of their character." But even in another time, there would have been something deeply troubling about a white, "cosmopolitan" (and in this case, not insignificantly, Jewish) critic insisting that the racist past prevents blacks from occupying the same literary ground on which the critic himself stands. Predictably, Howe was taken to task for his unwillingness to indulge the black writer the freedom to choose his own voice.

Ralph Ellison in particular took umbrage at Howe's insistence that both he, Ellison, in his novel *Invisible Man*, and James Baldwin, in his early novels and essays, had failed to reach the literary heights of Richard Wright's angry and bloody *Native Son*. Both of the younger writers, Howe felt, in their emphasis on form and universal subject matter, masqueraded as "Native Sons" and refused to stand up to the fact that they were really still "Black Boys." In his reply, which appeared in *The New Leader*, Ellison wrote that Howe "seems never to have considered that American Negro life. . . .is also a discipline. . . .There is a fullness, even a richness here; and here despite the realities of politics, perhaps, but nevertheless here and real. Because it is a human life." Claiming the right to choose any voice in which he felt comfortable communicating, the same right that Jewish writers like Howe claimed for themselves, Ellison wondered why, if Howe believed Richard Wright had an authentic black tone, was that the *only* authentic black tone. "He [Wright] had his memories and I have mine, just as I suppose Irving Howe has his."

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Perhaps Daniel Aaron expressed most succinctly the discomfort many felt with Howe's argument when he suggested that it was not the black writer who was imprisoned by his execrable past, but Irving Howe and like-minded others, who were fettered to the belief that black writers could not go the route of other ethnic American writers in passing from "hyphenation" to "dehyphenation," from the margins to the center of American literary life. "Even the well-wishers of the Negro, it seemed, were imprisoned by their liberal stereotypes, asserting unequivocally that all Negroes had identical experiences, bore the same psychic wounds, suffered the same slights and irritations," Aaron wrote.

In fairness, it is reasonable to conclude that Howe was indeed a "well-wisher" of blacks, and his position on black literature should not be misunderstood as an attempt to hold black writers to second-tier literary status, a disposition that John Cuddihy, in his surly and provocative 1974 book *The Ordeal of Civility*, suggested was typical of social-climbing Jewish critics. For Howe the moral and social condition of black Americans was simply so grave that it had to impinge on artistic output and, in fact, Howe felt rather horrible about saying so. "To say this," wrote Howe, "is not to propose the condescension of exempting Negro writers from moral judgement, but to suggest the terms of understanding, and still more, the terms of hesitation for making a judgement."

After the emergence of the Black Arts movement in the mid-1960s, which favored a nationalist and separatist style in black writing, Ellison's color-blind point of view fell out of vogue. "The Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community," wrote Larry Neal, the spokesperson for the new Black aesthetic, which insisted on the wedding of politics and art. Even Howe sheepishly acknowledged victory in the debate, but conceded that his own view had been mired in indecisiveness, "a token of equivocation, if not worse."

Nevertheless, today Ellison's insistence on the autonomy of the black writer appears to have taken on a new urgency. Prominent black academics and critics, frustrated with the literary racial preferences implied by Howe and other critics like Richard Gilman, who suggested in the late 1960s that white critics engage in a moratorium on judging black writing, now struggle to throw off the shackles of racial essentialism. Calling the Black Arts movement's sanctification of a single "authentic" black experience an understandable but largely ineffective response to historic white stereotypes, black critics like bell hooks, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Houston Baker, Jr., Angela Davis, Paul Gilroy, and Isaac Julien condemn it for its conservative and masculine character, repudiate the unitary idea of a black community, and espouse a black identity internally divided by class, sexuality, gender, age, ethnicity, economics, and political consciousness.

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Subscribing to postmodern notions of identity in which the self is continually and voluntarily created and recreated, the black critics insist that the color line can be redefined, crossed-over, and shifted, and set for themselves the project of reconstructing a literary canon that "recenters" black texts. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the "dean" of today's black intellectual cohort, insists that for contemporary black writers like Toni Morrison the challenge "seems to be to create a fiction *beyond* the color line, one that takes the blackness of the culture for granted, as a springboard to write about those human emotions that we share with everyone else."

Apparently, other observers are equally anxious to claim universality for black writers. Robert Boynton writes in the March 1995 issue of *The Atlantic* that Gates and company have emerged "to revive and revitalize" the role of the public intellectual after the passing of Howe's generation, "bringing moral imagination and critical intelligence to bear on the defiantly American matter of race—and reaching beyond race" to voice "the commonality of American concern." Professor Martin Berube claims in the January 1995 issue of *The New Yorker* that in fact the black nationalism which the black critics cut their teeth on can be every bit as universalist as the Marxism of the New York Intellectuals who preceded them. "What Marxism was to Lionel Trilling, Clement Greenberg, Philip Rahv, and company, black nationalism is to West, Gates, hooks, et. al.: the inspiration, the springboard, the template, but also the antagonist and the goad." All of this is very compelling. Indeed, who would deny that today, in the age of a large and expanding black middle-class, a black American Nobel Prize winner, and a critically acclaimed *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, the idea that a black writer must be consumed with racism seems as outdated as the idea that a black passenger must sit at the back of the bus.

But at least in terms of some of the most prominent black literary critics, the claim to have transcended the politics of the color line seems to have pulled up short on precisely the same grounds that Irving Howe suggested it must—that is, at the point where external conditions make it almost impossible for black writers to define themselves freely. The critical difference between the situation for the black writer today and in 1963 when Howe wrote his essay is that the external conditions imposed on black writing no longer arise solely from white racism, but are on some level self-inflicted, having to do mostly with the importance of racial representation in a radicalized multicultural environment.

It is ironic that those black critics who so enthusiastically engage poststructuralist theory for its inventiveness in recreating the self continue to be hemmed in by the racial branding of identity politics. The attraction of poststructuralism for black critics lies in its central theme—that objective truth does not exist and that all knowledge and texts are socially constructed

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devices through which the powerful perpetuate their domination over the weak. In this view, there exist no relevant standards of artistic judgment, no authoritative interpretation of texts, and no distinction between the "high" art of advanced civilizations and the "low" art of "mass" culture or folk art. These ideas form the basis for the efforts to "recenter" texts by black writers which have been ignored or overlooked by white critics immersed in Western literary theory.

But what first appears as liberation for black artists soon reveals itself to be nothing of the sort. If all knowledge is socially constructed, then the texts and the interpretation of texts reflect the perspective of social groups, or "interpretive communities," not that of individuals. The black writer, in this view, is not free to find his own literary voice, as Ellison had insisted he was, but merely reflects the oppressed nature of the social group to which he belongs. The liberating promise of poststructuralist theory for formerly ignored black writers is subordinated to the inherently political and social nature of artistic expression, leaving the black critic in exactly the same quandary as Irving Howe: how to free the black writer from the imperatives of the social world.

The disappearance of the self in poststructuralist criticism poses a serious obstacle to contemporary black critics who, according to Henry Louis Gates, Jr., seek to retrieve black literature in order "to write their rhetorical selves into language. I write, therefore I am." As the scholar Betsy Erkkila has written, while black critics like Gates and Houston Baker may embrace poststructuralist theory as an "emancipatory strategy in the analyses of black writing, neither has let go of the notion of a creative, expressive, signifying, and ultimately resistant and resisting black authorship."

It is not surprising, therefore, that the work of de-essentializing the black experience has not sufficiently involved the release of black criticism from the grip of racial protest. Black artists may now draw from a variety of social experiences—wealth, poverty, fame, obscurity, homosexuality, heterosexuality—but many black critics insist that what these new black voices share is resistance to white domination. The limited and restricting nature of this re-definition of blackness is most cogently expressed by the social critic Manning Marable in his 1995 book entitled, ironically, *Beyond Black and White*. Marable explains that the category of "black" includes in it all who are in some way oppressed. "We must find new room in our identity as people of color to include all other oppressed national minorities—Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Asian/Pacific Americans, Native Americans, and other people of African descent. . .working-class people, the physically challenged, the homeless, the unemployed, and those Americans who suffer discrimination because they are lesbian or gay."

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Marable's concern is not so much to move "beyond black and white," or to redefine blackness as something other than an unending exercise in racial subjugation, but rather to democratize the definition of blackness to enlist all potential allies in the fight against white males.

Marable's attempt to recall black identity to its true and salubrious origins in white victimization is joined by other prominent black critics in the fields of literature and culture. For example, Houston Baker, Jr., a scholar at the University of Pennsylvania and the former president of the Modern Language Association, holds black scholars and critics accountable to the imperatives of radical racial protest. In his widely read essay "Caliban's Triple Play," Baker proscribes the work of black writers in the following way. At a time when "violent reinforcement and retrenchment of white male hegemony dictates the dismantling of quotas meant to repair damages done by old. . .differentiations," Baker writes, all black writers are on "*display*," and their work had better be appropriately geared to carrying out "guerilla actions." In Baker's view, black critics are anything but free from the responsibilities imposed on them by race. "I believe that many Afro-American academics today find themselves in tenured (indeed, even 'chaired') situations where they are. . .compelled. . .to execute" attacks on the Western canon.

The black feminist bell hooks, like Marable, indicates that she is for moving beyond the color line, but, also like Marable, lapses into a false and impoverished notion of just what this might mean. Hooks claims that she is part of the new group of black critics who, on the one hand, "eschew essentialist notions of identity," but, contradictorily, also "fashion selves that emerge from. . .radical political commitments." Hooks counts herself among those black intellectuals who view their work as "directed towards . . .the strengthening of our collective capacity to engage in meaningful resistance struggle."

Hooks explains her belief that black essentialism is rooted in white supremacy and must therefore be resisted, but falls short of articulating a truly pluralistic black identity. In her view, no black can escape the experience of racial imprisonment, for the black "collective condition. . .has been and is characterized by continued displacement, profound alienation, and despair." Accordingly, given the choice of studying with a "progressive black professor" or a "progressive white woman" she would choose the black professor "because this individual would have brought to the class that unique mixture of experiential and analytical ways of knowing—that is, a privileged standpoint." For hooks it does not matter how far removed a black scholar may feel from racial "imprisonment" or "despair." Blacks are the only authentic interpreters of black history and literature, owing to the shared experience of white racism.

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Perhaps the most imaginative recent attempt to overcome the preoccupation with white racism in black culture comes from the Briton Paul Gilroy, who concerns himself in his 1993 book *Black Atlantic* with identifying a transnational black "counterculture." Gilroy skewers the essentialist approach to black art and cultural criticism for its "brute pan-Africanism" and its inability to "specify precisely where the highly prized but doggedly evasive essence of black artistic and political sensibility is currently located." But his defense of a "pluralistic" approach to black culture indicates that Gilroy shares with hooks an ambivalence toward relinquishing a black identity based on political protest. The difficulty, Gilroy explains, "is that in leaving racial essentialism behind by viewing 'race' itself as a social and cultural construction, it has been insufficiently alive to the lingering power of specifically racialized forms of power and subordination." Indeed, Gilroy's work is primarily motivated by his resistance to white racism. Behind his efforts in writing *Black Atlantic* and rethinking black nationalism, Gilroy explains, lies "the struggle to have Blacks perceived as agents, as people with cognitive capacities and even with an intellectual history—attributes denied by modern racism."

Gilroy's transatlantic black nationalism is based on his belief that even the most popular formulations of black nationalism like those of Martin Delaney, Marcus Garvey, and the Nation of Islam are products of Western domination, taken explicitly from European cultural criticism. Blacks must therefore use the small containers of autonomy given by the West, like music, to link forever artistic expression to political protest. "Artistic expression, expanded beyond recognition from the grudging gifts offered by the masters. . .therefore becomes the means towards both individual self-fashioning and communal liberation." One is only left to wonder the character of the "individual self-fashioning" that can be achieved through black artistic expressions that are, according to Gilroy, inherently and inescapably a form of political resistance.

The case of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. is a bit more complicated. Gates is far more willing to wrestle publicly with the difficulty of developing an alternative canon of minority works that could be taught alongside the classics of European culture. Unlike some of his colleagues, Gates admits that some texts are simply better than others, but insists that it is possible to identify a body of black works that are "complex and reflect layers of experience otherwise scarce, otherwise ignored." The real challenge for black critics, Gates writes in his influential essay "Writing, 'Race,' and the Difference it Makes," is "to speak the other's language without renouncing [our] own," to use "the most sophisticated critical theories and methods available to reappropriate and redefine our own 'colonial' discourses."

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But Gates is ultimately unwilling to subject black literature to the scrutiny of "the most sophisticated critical theories and methods available," writing on another occasion that "I once thought it our most important gesture to *master* the [Western] canon of criticism, to *imitate* and *apply* it, but I now believe that we must turn to the black tradition itself to develop theories of criticism indigenous to our literatures." Sounding very much like Irving Howe, Gates rounds on Ralph Ellison for denying the distinctive needs of black literature, concluding "that until we free ourselves of the notion that we are 'just Americans,' as Ellison might put it. . .we shall remain indentured servants to white masters."

Interestingly, it is in Gates's criticism that it is possible to observe the roots of this literary circumscription: specifically, the little noticed but nevertheless intimate connection between the debates over affirmative action and canon formation. Among other things, the supporter of racial preferences believes that there should be protection for individuals whose life experiences are dictated to an unacceptable degree by external prejudice. The literary equivalent of affirmative action, as articulated originally by Irving Howe and now promoted, as we have seen, by Gates, Baker, and hooks, views the art of racial minorities and women as largely representative of externally constructed categories of experience. In both instances, the self is primarily a creation of outside forces. But if de-essentializing black literature requires voluntary affiliations rather than involuntary ones, then the officially sanctioned system of demographic classification created by racial preferences militates against this quite worthy literary project.

And prominent black intellectuals are in no way immune from this system of racial classification. In the pursuit of multiculturalism, prestigious universities seek out black scholars and indulge them with their own departmental sanctuaries, replete with a constituency of students and access to a multitude of funding sources and publishing opportunities. In 1996, *The New York Times* reported that Gates himself secured an additional $11 million to run the W. E. B. DuBois Institute for Afro-American Studies, which is housed in a separate $25 million building at Harvard University. The incisive black critic Gerald Early gave voice to the paradox that arises when critics like Gates and Baker set out to create for themselves a sophisticated and mature style of criticism, but at the same time are regaled with the most conspicuous accoutrements of racial preferences. "Black scholars have obtained," Early writes, "a thoroughly bourgeois patronage of their authority as 'experts' in. . .race. . . .As they argue against 'essentialism,' their existence at the university. . .is built on the essentialist nature of their own representation."

Wherever one may fall in the debate over affirmative action as social policy, it is impossible not to see its manifestation in contemporary black

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criticism. Consider for a moment just how closely Gates's view of black canon formation resembles an affirmative action viewpoint of black writing. If it is one of the purposes of affirmative action to protect its beneficiaries from judgment on the basis of meritocratic standards, then, to a certain extent, isn't Gates trying to extend to black literature this same kind of protection by discrediting all literary criteria not based on race? Is he not saying that for black literature to be retrieved and appreciated, it is necessary to change the standards by which it should be judged? That even such a highly regarded and moderating voice as Professor Gates's should take this approach adds considerable weight to the words of the black legal scholar Stephen Carter, who insists in *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby* that "in our color-conscious, preference-bound society, there is no escape from the affirmative action thicket."

That the thicket of affirmative action governs the direction of black criticism may be the only reasonable explanation as to why black intellectuals have looked to black popular culture, particularly rap music, as the most desirable foundation for a *volkish* cultural nationalism. It may be one way privileged black elites compensate for the problematic relationship they have with the black poor. Perhaps this is why Cornel West, the most celebrated member of today's black academic elite, in his book *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America*, has no misgivings about the racial conscription of black musicians. "The repoliticizing of the black working poor and underclass should focus primarily on the black cultural apparatus, especially the ideological form and content of black popular music. . . .Black activists must make black musicians accountable in some way to the urgent needs and interests of the black community." In a similar vein, it may also be why Gates exaggerates the folk and vernacular origins of black literature. In the 1996 *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, Gates claims a place in the canon for black folk sermons, songs and stories, which he says constitutes a "talking book" and an "archive."

If it is true that the imperatives of postmodern race consciousness have prevented some contemporary black critics from moving much beyond the parameters set by Irving Howe, there has been at least one very promising development: the battle over diversity and the possibilities of black culture has now been joined by a cohort of widely respected black intellectuals like Stanley Crouch, Gerald Early, Orlando Patterson, Darryl Pinckney, and Shelby Steele, who strenuously insist that blackness can mean both everything and nothing at all. It is true that these writers have been somewhat marginalized within black intellectual circles, and that the battle between them and black critics on the left, in the words of Stephen Carter, "is in an important sense an unequal one, for the dissenters lack a black power base from which to intimidate their opponents." But it appears now that

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if there are large numbers of black intellectuals who have, albeit unwittingly, taken up the fight where Irving Howe left off, there is also a significant number of important individuals who can legitimately carry the torch passed to them by Ralph Ellison.

COMING SOON IN **PARTISAN REVIEW:**

- **Denis Donoghue** on **T. S. Eliot**
- **Eugene Goodheart** on **Marshall McLuhan**
- **H. J. Kaplan**'s "Reflections on Sade"
- New French Thought: **Annie Cohen-Solal** and **Dominique Schnapper**
- Reviews of **E. M. Cioran**, **Adam Michnik**, and **Eugenio Montale**
- Fiction by **Ivo Andrič**, **Arnost Lustig**, **Jerzy Pilch,** and **Muriel Spark**
- Poetry by **Mary Jo Bang**, **Kay Ryan**, and **John Updike**

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POEMS

YEHUDA AMICHAI

Mistake

When I was young I believed with all my heart
the Huleh swamp had to be drained.
Then all the bright-colored birds fled for their lives.
Now half a century later they're filling it with water again
because it was just a mistake. Maybe all my life
I've been living a mistake.
And the God of my childhood, he too
is a mistake, though he's still called God.
But the perfect mistake makes a perfect life,
like perfect faith. The saying, "Mistakes happen"
I've turned into a comforting song, and the verse
"All men are false" I've made into a dance tune by day,
a lullaby at night. Amen.

My Gideon

How did Gideon in the Bible choose his army at the Spring of Harod?
He observed how they drank the water.
Three hundred lapped the water as a dog laps
and all the rest kneeled down to gulp. He chose the first.
But my Gideon kept on choosing: What is their way with a woman,
in what position do they make love? And how do they cry,
with a loud wailing or with silent tears,
and how do they eat and how do they sleep, on their belly like a baby,
on their side or on their back, and how do they remember their childhood?

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And he didn't take those who remember and never forget a thing
and he didn't take those who forget and never remember a thing.
And one of them said, I drank from the fountain of longings,
and another said,
I have been to the enchanted place, and another said, I've never been there,
and the last one said, I stayed in the dream about the tumbling cake
of barley bread
and I am still tumbling. And my Gideon was left
with no army no battle no glory at the Spring of Harod. And he drank
kneeling down and he drank lapping the water with his tongue,
drank and remembered and forgot.

Translated by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld

RITA GABIS

Leaving the Garden

I grew to hate
the labor of it,
though the scent
was maddening;
lemon-mint
and sage,
tomato leaves
at dusk before bearing,
a musky ladder
of green.
It was contrived
all of it,
the scarified seed,
the light, white
fabric

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moths beat
powdered wings against
as if trying
to enter paradise.
Where was the chaos
of grief?
Where
the strange,
half-human
groans
one body
stroked
from another?
The long drought
encouraged me,
then a death,
pestilence—
slugs cored roots
with their tubby
blue-black
gleaming.
Winds
took over
the colors
I discarded,
their frills,
nasturtiums' silks,
all the stricken
shapes
of my desire.
Now birds
startled from their feasting
rise,
gesture
of the old life
flutters
up to light
in the thicket
the rank spill,
where I am just
one consequence
of its wildness.

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LEN ROBERTS

Fall

Even the leaves
couldn't keep him from the drink,
October's first cold fall
of reds and yellows and golds
nothing to him at all
except a safe place to drop,
if it came to that,
as he stumbled back from Boney's Bar,
sometimes making it all the way to our door
before giving it up and swaying
into the pile I'd raked
away from the fence
to where I judged
he might need it most,
like today, looking out at October
again, him twenty-seven years gone,
my son so much like him down there
in the big yard as he leaps
and swims in leaves
I have to shake my head to see
the blond hair instead of black,
the faultless eye, the clear cheek,
but still the stance is the same,
that one-legged kind of dance
he'd totter miles on
when the cold came
and he knew finally his wife had gone
off to Troy with another dark Irishman,
when the bottles leapt like leaves
from the shelves into his palm-open hands
and stuck there with their little hooks
until he'd emptied them and called for more,
and more came, all autumn long,
as the thermometer dropped

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with his dollars and change
on the long walnut bar,
only the wind of the barkeep's hand
waking him for the long walk home
in a draft he felt sneak
beneath the turned-up collar
and down into his wide-open heart
that turned brilliant red and veined
until it, too, had to stop
hanging on and let fall, let fall.

BRIAN SWANN

Neruda in Purgatory

"Si me preguntáis de dónde vengo, tengo que conversar con cosas rotas. . . ."

Blue patches of weather; shivered blue stone
I try to scratch a fire from. A single swallow
balks where red water screeches & an invisible hand
forces it into progressively narrower spaces.
Somewhere in the search for the useful,
nuptual matter, there still may be flowers
to pluck from sleepy faces. But not here,
the proletariat no more than a chronic itch;
not here where a man facing eternal loneliness
can only shoot out words like pistons,
abandoning gears, staring at the Janus hood-ornament.
I have been left to starve in a garden,
a jackdaw tacked to the gate, scarf fluttering
in tacky red clods. I start a fire. Each spark
gropes upward, as if up was the only nourishment.
They allow me my figurehead in the window
now the world is all shore. A sea-music less
than half-roar takes up what it can.
I was wrong, I was right. I was left
here where I devolve into spray, salt, bitter,
unlearned, not yet repentant. No one
sees the blood in the sand I lay the driftwood over,
and light a match. *Hay tantos muertos. . .*

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PETER DALE SCOTT

from *Minding the Darkness*

V.i

To Ronna, January 1, 1997—September 26, 1997

After the cherubim
of the Spinozan intellect
Dante rose up to the seraphim of love

who were in that small-looking space
between the knowledge of God
and God

but you have taught me
it is too easy
to love what will never hurt us

we are made for this world
when we love there will be pain
which we do not flee from

there being no gift more precious
than an opened heart
From *ladies who have intelligence of love*

I have learned a sweetness
I saw again just last night
the innocence in the face

of the child violist
wholly focused on the music
her eyes transmitted to her hands

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the *insegnamento* of grace
from instincts not yet too corrupted
by the pain of life

but since life in a world ill-governed
is a life of pain
the love exalted by Dante

was a love unconsummated
and tangential to daily life
His Beatrice survived by dying

What use was knowledge of that love
to Milton's first marriage
or T. S. Eliot's?

So from love *at one with reason*
(but not with the world)
the Elizabethans and Romantics

turned to its opposite
rejecting the stairway to heaven
in favor of this life

they explored the grandeur
of love as obsession
the kind of headline-maker

that leads from opera
to bad Hollywood movies
as if this were progress

and not a return to the passion
the Buddha warns about
I cannot claim total ignorance

of desires which shamed me
even as I surrendered to them
(my wild eye fixed

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on that gold slipper
on the table beside the bed
riding like a chariot of fear)

or of pleasures which cost nothing
except an almost imperceptible
hardening of the heart

but none of these sweet emotions
ever shook up my life
and went to its very core

as does sheer being with you
at first your close eye
for the details of life

which could set us both laughing
then those secrets just for ourselves
not to be shared

about which I will only say
some of them are like a furnace
a smelter in which rare metals are refined

so intense you must forgive me
for the dross which sometimes
surfaces in my heated speech

and other times more mundane
just now in the breakfast nook
slicing the ginger root

for your cup of fresh tea
or coming to you last night
standing face to face

to have my collar buttoned
to the Alpine meadows in Whistler
or the view down from the Monte di Nava

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to our windows in the Villa Serbelloni
and then in that dark month
after your brother died

(a loss compared to which
the fire where you lost all your possessions
was a mere bonfire)

I knew then there were parts of you
no man will never understand
but I have no need to

you have taught me to listen
to the emotions which rest on my heart
like the hushed mists

hanging over this dark September lake
and to that ever-present friend my breath
the inward seashore

on our journey into the earth
where you listen also
(we are more mindful of each other

because mindful of something larger)
which spirit inhabits
(let me say to the Sutras

that opening my heart this way
is like entering the Stream)
What has emerged besides pain

in these four years
since you lost your brother
cousins uncles father

is a love facing death
not just remembering death
I listen to your heart

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courageously counting the seconds
for both of us
an incarnation

of the First Noble Truth
love opening hearts to joy
opens them also to pain

the unloved never experience
for which they are not to be envied
for us each increase

in our security together
is a heightened risk
sometimes almost to the verge

of excruciation
the check to the breath
I remember on the sheer cliff

fingers and cheek on a cleft
as I summoned the courage to drop
back to the narrow ledge below me

or failing that to the bottom
with its four white crosses in a row
the world seeming at an end

I had never before felt
so concentratedly alive
as now unable to imagine

living without you

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LUCIEN STRYK

Star Gazer

(for Ted on his eighteenth birthday)

Drifts of wind strike old
music through the air,
concert of dusk smothered
in the bedlam—tires screeching

by the pavement where I tap
my heels with strangers,
waiting the traffic light.
Under a starling ballet

round St. Martin's spire,
I watch a beggar searching
through a rubbish bin.
And were we made of stars?

My grandson thought so once.
Close to me, singing purely,
"There was a man lived on
the moon." Was his name

Aiken Drum? Now grown, half-
way across the world, with
such a cold, clear sky, does
he remember as he aims his

telescope? Can he make out
a cloud no bigger than a wintry
breath covering that half
moon? Will he follow planets

until dawn slips over night?

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NASIMA SULTANA

You Said That the Map Would Be Mine

You said, that house would be mine;
the dark road, yellow house, blue curtains
in every room, neon lights,
freshly-bloomed roses in flower vases would be mine.
You said, that plot of land, field, farm, water-
hyacinth pond were mine, all mine;
by the front door a milch cow, a trellis covered
with bottle gourd,
night-times sleeping under the *śiuli*-tree
were mine alone.
Why did you say this?

Why did you say my hair would fly
in the salt-laden wind?
At Worldly Shores on the banks of the rippling river
I'll sit dangling my feet, closed up in my memories,
and never say a word.

But why have the dark road and yellow house
not come to be mine?
. . .Why not?

But why won't my hair fly in the slippery wind
of Worldly Shores?
Why won't it fly?
All by itself
my childhood won't play, sinking its face, sinking its hands
into the rice filling the granary. . .

Now I'm hungry, now I'm sleepy,
the map in my fist is getting soaked in sweat and blood.
You said that the map would be mine:
why did you say it?

Translated from the Bengali by Carolyne Wright and Mohammad Nurul Huda

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MIGUEL HERNÁNDEZ

Perhaps

Perhaps now, of their own volition,
men adorn some serene country treeline
with the carob, the beech, the oak, the pine,
that will supply the timber for my coffin.

Now, perhaps, the lumberjack battles
and works it with murderous blows,
and, perhaps, along the slope of the road
it stands bleeding then resounding falls.

Now, perhaps, he reduces it to geometry,
to flat planks, he who readies
the last refuge of all those now alive.

And certainly, not perhaps, and for eternity
the dark earth is ready
to receive my definitive goodbye.

Translated from the Spanish by Ted Genoways

ROBERT HAHN

The Flayed Man at the *Fin-de-siècle*

"Not to enchant" was the new prescription,
Not to bemuse or charm, but to witness,

And so restore the power art once had,
To transform and to save. But when was that?

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And who these new masters, who prescribe
The right poses, as if one could be right

About suffering? Consider the case
of the Flayed Man, his face sculpted by pain

Indescribably, though it's Mannerist,
His lips contorted into waves which twist

Around a hollow mouth, from which a scream
Pours forth, to drain meaning of its meaning

Once and for all. The procedure begins
When a crank is turned, and the strip of skin

A surgeon has prepared is ripped, and rolled
Up on a spit. It ends by unfolding

A map of new, red flesh. "What kind of times
Are these?" *Man Being Flayed,* 1590,

Renders in paint a public spectacle
Which for centuries was nothing special

Though it had a purpose. When Romans lined
A brick road with men they had crucified

The point of that anguish was to be plain,
Less cruelty than communication.

But when a pious Japanese surgeon
Tries vivisection, only to observe

The effects, times have changed. "The man was strapped
Down on a bed. He seemed resigned to what

Was happening—but then when I began
To cut the chest open, from the top down,

I'd never seen a face like that, heard sounds
Like that, such howling, come from someone's mouth"—

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A text not taken from a war-crimes trial,
But the good doctor's log—"after a while

It stopped." The time was 1942,
A prison camp whose horrors could outdo

Belsen, with new experiments each day.
For example, two men were stripped naked

In a courtyard. Inside, behind windows,
The officers could watch, and set down notes

As they observed the men begin to freeze,
Who knew how soon. Thirty below zero.

"Toward the end, their agony was so great,
They tore each other's flesh with fingernails."

I know nothing. To witness this outrage
Changed nothing for these men. No one was saved.

My only hope, my only prayer for them
Is that it end, that their agony end,

As it did, but not soon. Their murderers
Would live on, in a Tokyo suburb

Where they would treat patients and tend gardens
With painstaking care and die in their beds.

Time would pass. The long century would close
That began with Apollinaire's great *Zone,*

And ended, where, with *Flow Chart,* or *Garbage,*
Amidst our canon wars, once all the rage.

Auschwitz and Hiroshima were the end
Of art, we said, thinking they should have been.

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EDA KRISEOVÁ

A Whirl of Witches

Somewhere in Žižkov there is a square courtyard and in the center stands a stately chestnut tree. Balconies line the insides of the buildings that enclose the courtyard, leading straight into the kitchens of the flats.

The candlelike blossoms of the chestnut gave the air a bitter scent as we walked up the winding stone staircase, and then along wooden stairs to an attic. Sonya rang the bell at a low, dark door. It was quiet for a moment, with only the smell of frying grease wafting under the door. And then it opened so suddenly that I jumped. A tall, hefty woman stood there in the dusk, surrounded by the thick smell of broiling fat and onions. With a soft hand she led me in and gave me a pair of crocheted slippers. I took off my shoes and removed a bottle of wine from my bag.

"You shouldn't have," the woman said in a deep voice. Her breasts nudged me as we squeezed past two wardrobes in the hallway and through to the main room.

It was so smoky in the room that I had trouble distinguishing people from furniture, and my eyes began to tear. Two women sat at a coffee table and between them they had cards arranged in one of the basic tarot patterns.

"She's good," Sonya said after she had introduced us. "But you'll see."

Beside the cards stood three upturned coffee cups, and beneath them three little captured fates. The women drank the coffee, turned the cups upside down, and tapped three times on the bottom of each cup with a spoon in order to read the future in the grounds. Radio Star was playing Moravian folk songs in the background.

"We're glad you came," the hostess welcomed me. "We girls are always telling each other's fortunes, but it's just not quite the same anymore."

She had a square face and was built as solidly as an anvil. She smiled broadly, maternally. Everything in the room was tiny: little porcelain dogs, little vases, little blankets, and the hostess looked like Snow White in the house of the Seven Dwarfs. Lonely women fuss over objects as they do over memories. I noticed immediately that the two women sitting in front of the cards held their pocketbooks on their laps, which is another sign of the unmarried state.

"She'll tell your fortunes," said Sonya, who had brought me there, "and you'll see for yourselves how good she is."

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All three of them looked at me with hope—something I don't like to arouse in people.

"I hope you'll also tell mine," I said, faltering.

"She doesn't have it easy either," Sonya added and took me by the hand. "Life is a burden, ladies. Jana there," she pointed to a tiny dark woman who looked Sicilian, "will certainly read for you. She'll tell you what you can expect and what you can't avoid. But how about some coffee—Gabby?"

The giant hostess rushed behind the curtains into the kitchen and I remembered that the best fortune-tellers in the world are supposedly found in Sicily. Wealthy women from Milan and Florence travel there to see them.

"I work with Gábina at the office," the Sicilian woman said, smiling at me, "We tell each other's fortunes each morning, afternoon, and evening. We read all three coffees we drink during the day."

"But she's always saying the same thing," Gábina shouted from the kitchen. "I'll drop dead of a heart attack from so much coffee and my lover will still be sitting at home. The things she's promised me—I couldn't even begin to tell you."

"Finish my cards, Jana, okay?" begged Hilda, a tender little blonde whose complexion was interwoven with a web of blue veins. She resembled a porcelain doll I once received for my birthday. It had been my mother's, and had a straw hat with tiny roses sitting on its curls, and I was so happy at the time that I didn't wish for anything else in the world. A few days later, in a rage at my mother, I threw the doll out the window as revenge. I don't know whose pain was worse. We both cried and Mother strung the blue porcelain eyes on a wire and put them in a cup in the cupboard. They tortured me there for years with their winking gaze. Hilda awoke pangs of conscience in me even now, but I didn't know her well enough to admit to the murder.

Sonya and Gábina were in the kitchen whispering behind the curtain. Perhaps Sonya was telling her how it first occurred to me that I could see the future. It was on an island in the Adriatic. We were lying on a stone plateau which inclined to the sea, and from the west a storm was nearing—but we didn't see it, because it was behind the rock-face, and we didn't hear it, because the sea rattled pebbles at our feet. Only when the sky turned green and the waves washed over our feet, splashing the boulders beneath us, did we get dressed and run over the island to the one pub, located near the dock. Lightning was already zig-zagging across the sky and falling into the sea, and gray-white rain poured down on us.

In the pub I stared for a long while into the black-and-white picture in the coffee cup and suddenly things began to connect. Figures entered

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into actions and relationships. Beings dark and light moved from past to future. It's a strange fate, the thread we follow from the beginning to the end of our lives. One, two, three coffees—and then I had to stop.

Everything I foretold on that island later came true.

The Sicilian, who was from somewhere in Vršovice, was predicting love for the porcelain doll: he would be bearded, and she would meet him in a large group within a month, or at most two. It would be a great love, love at first sight, and the man would protect the doll from all evil and take her away from the world. I don't ever speak that concretely, but rather in pictures, metaphors. I wondered if they would like it, and whether I would see anything at all.

"You're having coffee, right?" the hostess called into my ear, shaking me and bringing me back to myself. "Hilda will do Jana's cards now, and in the meantime we'll drink the coffee and tap our cups, so we can find out what we don't know. Hilda's got everything worked out, she doesn't need to know anything more, but I'm really badly off, and so now Jana will read me and then we'll bring you in as well, because more witches know more."

"I'm next in line for Hilda," said Jana, "I'm always reading and everyone forgets about me."

I asked the hostess for coffee and she disappeared again behind the curtain. I know burly women whose spirits are like those of newly hatched doves, and I know delicate lilies who manage to blackmail men with sex their whole lives; I know dreamers and vigilant sleepwalkers. But I also know women stately and mysterious in love and joy, to whom, regardless of their age, those less alive fasten themselves, and always until death.

"But Jana," Hilda said, "you haven't got it so bad."

"I haven't got it so bad!" Jana said angrily, showing a temperament from both Sicily and Vršovice. "You all think that I've let go of it, but I still love him. The further away he gets from me, the more I love him, and when he comes back, it's unbearable after just a few minutes. He's always saying 'Jana, you're a woman for the hard-to-please. I am an ordinary man and you have a train station in your head. One train is coming, another is leaving, a third is getting ready to go, and a fourth is waiting, and I can't make heads or tails of any of it. It's nothing but whistles and shrieks and speeding from one tunnel to the next—who can stand it?' I say to him, 'Stay here, I need someone to be here so I won't be scared at night,' but he is afraid of me—he's told me that. Do you know what he told me?—'Jana, you'd like to make me into Prince Charming and I'm just a frog.'"

"You should have taken him just as he is," said Gábina. "I would take my tomcat just as he is, if only he were here, if only he would leave that witch of his. You're too demanding, Jana. He's with you at Christmas, and

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at Easter—do you know what it's like spending Christmas with my old mother? He has his family and I don't have shit—just two old parents."

"He would stay," said Jana. "Except that when I have a bit to drink he starts to get on my nerves and I let him have it. And when I let him have it he gets offended and leaves, and he doesn't come back for days—sometimes even a month. And I suffer so much."

"Then why do you throw him out, if you want him?"

"Maybe I don't want him."

"You're beginning to sound like a bad novel. The ideal man is a fantasy, an illusion, you know," said Hilda, tapping Jana on the head with her forefinger. "When you finally realize this, you'll be old and it'll be too late for anything. And then you'll be sorry that you didn't love when there was still someone *to* love."

Silence fell over the room. All the women were smoking, exhaling clouds as if they were burning on the edge of passion, and I realized that I had fallen in among the martyrs of love—among women who were constantly seeking and yet couldn't find, and it was getting late, and maybe they would never find what they sought. Perhaps one of them would have a child so that she wouldn't be alone, all the while loving someone who would never be with her. That's the way the world works: we love the one who pulls away from us, as if the most distant star were the most beautiful. Maybe only that which we cannot have remains beautiful, and we die with the image of the unattainable before our eyes.

Jana watched me attentively. She gazed at me for a long time, looking me over, and I felt a strange trembling in my chest. It seemed she was attaching herself to me and sucking something mysterious out of me, something that I was now sweating like an oak sweats its sap.

"Is your dress real cotton?" she asked.

I assured her that it was. She fell silent again and the trembling returned, and then she freed me from her gaze, narrowed her dark eyes into slits and said:

"I won't tell your fortune."

I jumped, because I knew that she had just read some kind of message in me, and that she knew something I didn't know, and didn't want to tell me. This is how I protect myself from impending doom: I chase off the dark message, but it constantly implores me to recognize it, because its seeds have already been sown and therefore the consequences are inevitable. The message goes on asking for trouble until it gets it. Some people are happy in their misery but I am not one of them: that's why I was afraid.

"Why not?" I asked, and she didn't answer. I was asking for trouble, coming here when I was unhappy. Perhaps I should just sit home in the

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yellow light of family and wait until my husband comes back from work, and have dinner cooked, a blank face, and a warm body smelling of cake.

"Because you're the type who knows how to make a mess out of life. An intellectual. I don't read them, you know? When I take on some designer at our firm, it's simple. What can happen to her? But if I looked at your cards, my head would burst. Often after a case like yours I still have a headache the next day."

I became even more afraid. For card-readings I have Růzenka in the asylum. She's tough, but I'm not afraid of her. If she sees two coffins by Christmas in your future, she'll tell you, even if she loves you more than anyone in the world. But Růzenka doesn't only forecast doom, she also advises on what a person should do in order to get the best out of misfortune—what misfortune can do for her, because each of us is filled with misfortune, like a woman pregnant with child. She doesn't believe in barren misfortune. But enough is enough. Gábina had in the meantime returned from the kitchen, to which the whistling kettle had called her. She carried a saucer in each hand with cups wobbling on them. Black foam spilled over the edges and ran down the sides of the white cups. She set down the coffee in front of me and herself.

"I'll have another," she said, "Even if it gives me a heart attack. I have to know how it will turn out with me and Fanda. But first Jana will read my cards. Meanwhile my coffee-grounds will cool down and dry out. And then you can have a look at them."

"I would rather not know anything about you," I said. "I read best when I don't know anything about a person."

"OK, fine," Gábina agreed. "So Jana will read Hilda and tell her how it's going with Pepa. Even though she is going to meet the love of her life soon, for now she's got Pepa, and we're here to tell her to kick him out, because there's no point in it. He isn't going to leave his old witch, and she's ruining her life. She's still young and deserves something better. He's just whetting his appetite with Hilda. He comes once a week and it's enough for him—doesn't he tell you it's enough that you're just there?" she asked Hilda sharply.

Hilda blushed in her white V-neck and assented.

"If he doesn't come for good, it won't amount to anything," Gábina said. "I would put a knife to his throat. The way I did to Fanda. Enough fun, I said to him, and I gave him an ultimatum. His month is running out. He came once and brought me flowers, but I threw him out. 'Have you decided yet?' I asked him, but all he keeps saying is that he loves me, he can't live without me, but he can't do anything for me."

"But I love him," Hilda said quietly, bursting into tears.

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"Hilda, darling," Gábina said with pity, putting her arms around the porcelain doll who sobbed on her stately breast. "Listen to me, Hilda dear. A beautiful girl like you can have a normal man and not some old house-shoe. You're only wasting time and all your opportunities with him."

"But I love him," Hilda sobbed. "I'll never love anyone the way I love him. If I could break it off I would, but I can't. I think about him all the time and I dream about his witch—almost every night I dream about her and I'm looking for him but can't find him. Sometimes I wish I was old already and didn't need a man—I wish I was past caring."

"So stop wanting him," said Jana. "If you let him go, he'll come to you on his own. We never get the things that we want too much—isn't that true, ladies?"

We agreed.

"If he would only tell her," Hilda said, weeping, "maybe something would give a little."

"Good God," Gábina shouted. "She thinks that the witch will help her. That she'll throw him out and then he'll come to her. But you're quite mistaken. If she was nasty to him before, now she'll start being nice. When a man can't see any other way out he clings to his wife, runs back to her, and she takes care of him and chases off the other woman. Then everything is as it was and he goes looking for a little something on the side again."

"Or she gets sick," said Jana. "I knew one woman who decided that she had cancer, and he started to jump at her every whim—of course he wasn't such a monster that he would leave a dying woman. He stayed home and is there to this day. She's as healthy as a horse and he has migraines. Whenever he just can't stand it anymore he throws himself on the bed and draws the curtains, and she can't get to him."

"Only society ladies who aren't happy with their sex life and don't know it have migraines," said Gábina, who was still cradling Hilda in her strong embrace.

"Men can have them too," said Jana. "They can get all possible illnesses from women, except heart attacks, which they get from work."

I thought about the pure thing, which cannot be soiled, but which can leave us of its own will if we don't respect it enough. Love is given to people by God, and when he fails to give it to someone, they seek it in vain their whole life. What do we want to hear about our future? That we will love and be loved. Once, when I told a fifty-year-old woman, happily married, grandmother of two, that another love would come into her life, she blushed gently and shyly as if she were twenty. What is better: to love or to be loved? And who can say, at the end of their life, "I loved as much as I could and I regret nothing, because my life has been fulfilled." How can this feeling be recognized? Does love have some limit?

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"I met one man," Gábina was saying, "he was rolling around with two women, until they got together and turned against him. Now he's old and sick, living in a maid's room with a tile floor and oil paint on the walls, no bigger than a pantry. He has only an iron bed and over it hangs the cross that he was given for repentance. His wife won't bring him so much as a glass of water and his lover emigrated to Australia. She's found herself some kangaroo there and they have a drugstore together."

Gábina let go of Hilda, who had stopped crying. She wiped her eyes with a handkerchief and turned to Jana, who was sitting across from her on a couch covered with a blue-green plush cloth. She handed her the pack of cards.

"Now it's time to eat," said Gábina, and she stood up and shook out her skirt, which had stuck to the back of her legs. There were dark spots on the material where Gábina had been sweating in her anxiety over Hilda. Fragile Hilda, who hovers like a moth around the light of her love and wants to burn her wings, would happily burn them off even, so that she could no longer fly and would instead have to crawl over the earth on her belly.

"Jana, please, have a look at my cards," Hilda begged. Jana shuffled the cards and laid them out in a fan, from which Hilda was to pick thirteen cards for love.

"He's kind," Jana began in a tired voice. "He's up to his ears in it, he lies to her in order to have peace. Men want to have peace and quiet at home, darling. She doesn't know about you and she won't find out."

"But he promised he'd tell her. He said himself that he couldn't live a lie anymore and that he loves me so much that he can't sleep with her anyhow."

"He sleeps with her," Jana said.

"That's impossible," Hilda moaned.

"He doesn't want to have a fight at home and he's afraid of scenes."

"But he said he'd only be with me, because he's never loved anyone like he loves me and I am the light of his life."

"They all say that. But in reality they don't want to move, because they're tired. Or they think they might do it, imagining a better life, but in the end they stay where they are. Am I wrong?" she asked, turning to me.

"I don't know," I answered, and I really didn't know. At sixteen I fell in love with my husband and since that time I've only been with him. Am I really a woman if I've only had one man? And am I already so old that my daughter, washing the dishes in the kitchen, wails into the sink: "Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?"

"You have too much faith in him, Hilda, and that's the source of your unhappiness. I've been telling you from the beginning: skim off the cream

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and leave the milk behind. But you never let it rest and you want to resolve it honestly and justly. Men aren't like that. It doesn't matter to him, right?" she turned again to me.

"I really don't know," I answered, thinking of my husband, who was probably with his lover right then. Will it ever occur to him that he promised me fidelity? Gábina came into the room carrying plates, on which were skillfully arranged potato salad and fried meat.

"Everyone has to eat," she said, pushing aside the cards laid out for love. In their place she put white plates with gold edges.

"If only one of us would find a decent man," she said, brushing away with her elbow the hair stuck to her square forehead.

"Lighten up now, girls! Do you know what an old woman told me the other day while standing in line for liver? The best is yet to come, she said, because the most beautiful love in life is autumn's. You're old enough not to suffer, but just to enjoy it and not stake your whole life on it. And when the old lady talked about love she crossed herself, as if she were going past a church. And do you know how old she was? Eighty-six!"

We ate the hot meat and the cold salad and my teeth shivered as they sometimes did during lovemaking. Most likely I gave all I had to my husband. Now that it's already too late, I know. Maybe I should have tried harder, but I also know that trying wears out love more than anything else.

While Gábina was cleaning the table she asked who would bet a bottle of wine that Fanda would come the next day with an even bigger bunch of flowers than last time. Hilda and Jana voted in favor. I abstained, but it looks like Gábina will definitely win that bottle.

Gábina took the upside-down coffee cup and handed it to me. I felt as if I were emerging from the bottom of a pond. On the bottom there were green runners and half-rotten roots, thickly intertwined in a dark green muck. I came up, stirring up mud which rose around me like a widow's veil, and broke the surface with my head. In front of me I saw a big head floating in gray smoke, with a face pale and pitiful, full of expectation and uncertain hope. Gábina was already almost drowning, but she held a coffee cup and she was handing it to me. The evil water-spirit Vodnik was holed up in the muddy bottom of the pond. She couldn't find him and give him her soul—that's why she was giving it to me. Where can my husband be? Is he collecting souls, or only bodies?

"What have I got there?" Gábina demanded.

I searched the coffee grounds and tried to erase all my thoughts—iron them into the solid white cloth of my mind. Only then could I search for some story or event in the pictures. A beginning or an end, a chain of cause and effect. People create the causes, and then wonder at the effects.

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"What have I got there?" Gábina asked. Jana had tucked her legs underneath her, and was watching me, unmoving. Hilda, the fragile one, had rolled up into a ball in the armchair and seemed completely immersed in the misery of her love. Gábina leaned over to me across the table. Up close her complexion was oily and porous and her lower lip trembled. The other seers fell silent. Sonya, who had brought me here, was looking through a year-old Neckerman catalog.

"What have I got there?" Gábina asked for the third time.

"You have a cliff," I said, "and in it is firmly fixed a bearded man. You are standing in front of the cliff, and you want to pull him out of it, or break the rock, but you aren't able to do it. You will have to go around the cliff."

"So I won't be with him?" asked Gábina again, up close, and her face went gray.

"Maybe you will be, but in a different way than you think."

"What different way?"

"Perhaps you will make some compromise."

"Not that," said Gábina irritably. "I've had enough of tinkerings. I told him: either me, or the wife—I won't be your whore anymore. Now he's bringing me flowers, but I'm not giving him any. I can be tougher than you can imagine."

"He won't ever come for good."

"How do you know?"

"I'm reading it in the grounds."

"And you know for sure?"

"I don't know."

"Then how can you say that?"

"You wanted to know."

"Now Gábina," Sonya said, "calm down, or she won't tell you anything more."

"But I can't live without him," Gábina said. Big tears rolled from her eyes and their whites turned red. She wiped her cheeks and eyes with her palm like a small child without a handkerchief.

"Maybe it's not him," I suggested shyly.

"It's him. You said a bearded man, and Fanda has a beard."

Gábina shook with tears and Jana sat down next to her and took her by the shoulders and comforted her. She rocked her body from side to side, while Gábina whined softly like a puppy crying in its sleep.

Sonya stood up and took a big key off a hook near the door. She showed it to me and we went out onto the balcony. The chestnut lit up the courtyard.

"You shouldn't have said that," Sonya said just outside the door.

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"And you think she'll get him?"

Sonya shook her head. "His wife is really horrible."

"That doesn't matter. He needs her to be horrible so that he has an excuse to be unfaithful."

"Everyone wants a little happiness."

"But she's waiting for something that will never happen. He won't leave either his wife or Gábina. He's going to stay in place like that cliff and she'll suffer."

"He can't stay with a woman that he doesn't love," Sonya said. I didn't say anything because I know that hatred binds people more than love does. And some people need to be unhappy and regard with horror the idea that their dream might come true. Sonya gave me the key, turned on the light, and I opened the low brown door.

"Go first," Sonya said. "And tell her something nice. Gábina is the sweetest girl in the world."

When we returned Gábina was sitting with her legs stretched out on the blue-green upholstered sofa. She had her arms propped on her meaty thighs and her spine was straight. It occurred to me that perhaps the man in the cliff-face was the first to have moved her, the first to have set in motion the pendulum that swings from eternity to eternity.

"I gave him an ultimatum," Gábina said, "and he. . . ."

"Don't say anything. The coffee will tell me more and you would only confuse me."

I took her cup again and hoped that I would see something positive in it. Really positive.

"After you get past the cliff," I said, "you will meet a man with a fox's face. You will go with him hand-in-hand, and he will support you, but you won't love him. Only after him will you meet the greatest love of your life. He will also have a beard, but he'll be bigger and stronger than the one who stays in the cliff. He'll take you in his arms and arch over you like a rainbow."

"Please," Gábina interrupted me just when it was going well, "please—couldn't it be the same man?"

I shook my head.

"It's a different one," I said and looked at Sonya, who grimaced at me, displeased.

"And then what?" asked Gábina, and her hardness softened like a night's snowfall in the rays of the morning sun.

"You will love each other greatly and in the end you will be left alone and be satisfied," I promised. "The angel of peace and love is hovering over you."

"Of course," Gábina said. "In the end I must be alone if Fanda is ten years older than me—he'll die sooner."

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"She's not talking about Fanda," said Jana.

"She isn't sure," Gábina objected. "She said herself that it's only a game, and who can tell one bearded man from the next in some coffee grounds?"

Why, in her youth, did she not find a single man who would be only hers and give her children? Why does she want someone who already has it all behind him? How many times can a person fall in love before he wears out, before he forever debases his own feelings?

"But I love him and want him," Gábina said.

"His wife would have to die first."

"And she won't?"

At that moment I saw a black death mask on the white background.

"She will," I assured her.

Maybe right now a woman I don't know is wishing that I would die. I probably have all the good things in life already behind me. I fell in love with my husband and I love him to this day. I've never loved anyone else and I've never been unfaithful to him. I have children. What do I want from these women? Do I want them to tell me that he'll come back? And if he did come back, what would it be like? I feel pressure on the back of my eyes and the objects in the room are getting hazy. I see mist with white sparks shooting through it. I'd like to be home, but there's water here, nothing but water and on its misty surface I see the head of my husband floating toward me. I try to grab it, but it slips out of my hand each time. I don't feel it, but I see it for a moment and it's smiling like when we first met, shy and happily insecure. I close my eyes and see darkness, and then a light suddenly appears, dazzling me. I quickly open my eyes and I'm back in the room holding a cup with someone's fate in it. A woman I hardly know has fixed me with a gaze full of impatience. I could give her the grace of illusion, fish her out of the swamp and place her on the grass in the middle of a summer meadow in a circle of kindly sunlight.

What have we failed to fulfill? What did we once lose—now lost forever?

"I knew from the start that one of us would have to go," said Gábina.

"But he won't be here anyhow," I said. "I don't see him in this room."

Anyone could see that he doesn't belong here. The room is full of furniture, little vases, little blankets. What could they possibly do with themselves here? They would stare at each other and at the TV. In a year's time Gábina would be as fat as his wife. Perhaps love is at its best in the first flash, when the world opens up to us again and we imagine what will follow it. I've seen my husband's lover and she looks like me. Maybe she's sweeter now than I am, but she won't be for long.

"I'll wait," said Gábina. "It's worth it to me. I'm a patient woman and anyhow I know that I'll never love anyone like I love Fanda."

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It used to be that men fought in wars against other men. The stronger was victorious. In this war women don't stand facing each other, because they don't know about each other, and yet it is perhaps the last human battle on earth. Femininity will triumph as the last remaining truth.

"She'll get an incurable disease," I said. "She already has it, but she doesn't know it."

"She had an operation," said Gábina. "He moved in with me and said that he'd decided. He had left his wife and was going to stay with me. I was happier than I'd ever been in my life. We were both happy. When they let her out of the hospital he packed his bags and left. I thought I wouldn't survive it. I called to get him to explain and he told me that I had the wrong number to get rid of me. Can you imagine? What would you do in my place?"

Gábina burst into tears again. Crying, her face changed into some prematurely-aged organ that shouldn't be displayed. It seemed very wrong to me. Fanda should be the one to die. I stood up and picked up the cup. Slowly I walked with it into the kitchen and rinsed it out with water. I had an ugly feeling that I had once again toyed with fate. Why didn't God just create one-sexed creatures who procreate by dividing in half?

"We'll all get there one way or another," Sonya sang. "Some sooner and some later. . . ."

"Love and death are mysteriously connected. And yet people still want to love."

"It's a pain living with men," said Jana. "I've already lived with so many, but I always realize eventually that I'm better off alone. I've got everything at home neat and orderly, and I know where things are. A man makes a tool shed out of your house."

She's very mousy, it occurred to me. Gray and worn out. Perhaps she is constantly making greater and greater concessions and always getting less. Maybe she is already not giving herself fully. She satisfies herself with less and disappoints even herself. Again I submerge in the depths of the green pond. I have weeds instead of hair and my hands and feet are growing webs. I'm a frog, sitting over a spring. I would like to turn into a tree. I would stand by a path in a field somewhere near Vysočina. Another tree would stand next to me and our crowns would intertwine. The same wind would blow our leaves. And all around us would be a landscape empty of humans, interwoven with paths and bordered with thyme and juniper.

"You're married," said Jana, who had in the meantime taken up my coffee cup. "You've been married a long time and your husband has fallen in love with someone else."

I assented, my chest contracting as if I was actually surprised by this.

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"He loves her," Jana said, looking at me kindly, with the wisdom of one who already has the worst behind her.

"I know," I said. "But what am I supposed to do? I tried yoga and Zen and they work when nothing much is going on. But when you're in trouble, they're weak. I took drugs, but they made me incapable of doing anything. I got drunk twice a week, but I can't drink anymore—I throw up before I get drunk."

"He'll come back," said Jana. "And he'll be all yours again. But you have to be patient and wait until he gets over it."

"It's hard," I said, wanting to cry. "You don't know how hard it is."

"Would you like another cup of coffee?" Gábina asked, putting her arms around my shoulders. In doing so she lifted me off the chair slightly and rocked me gently back and forth, comforting me. I laid my head on her breast and felt her whole warm body, stately and safe.

"You're the kind of woman who has to see everything out to the bitter end," said Jana. "There'll be more to enjoy—as I'm saying, your husband will come back to you, and you'll have another child. But then you will meet a man who is everything you've ever imagined and you'll fall deeply in love, until you become distraught. He'll be married. Then you'll remember us."

Gábina took my head in her hands, stroked my hair and smiled in my face. Her face, softened, was beautiful now. If I were a man I would choose Gábina. She can take anything, and if her man were to collapse she would take him on her back and carry him along their common path. And she'll always be opening her arms, comforting and stroking.

"I'll pour you a drop of cognac, OK? We keep it here for especially difficult cases." She took a glass with a thin stem out of the cupboard and as she held it in her hand I realized how delicate she herself was. She's the most feminine of us all. Such women triumph most often, as do those men who are the most masculine.

"Drink up," she said, handing me the glass. "We women have to put up with everything."

Radio Star began to play the national anthem and it reminded me that I had to go to work early the next day.

I started to say goodbye.

"The best is yet to come for you," said Jana. "You have a husband and children, and you will have a great love. You're the happiest one of all of us."

Suddenly it seemed to me that I was. I was like the juniper, which stands on the edge of the field, raised high against the sky, alone but happy. The juniper with eyes fixed in all directions and beneath itself deep, immovable roots.

"Thank you," I said, "but I really must go."

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"I envy you," Sonya said when we were outside on the balcony.

I stopped and gaped at her face, in which shone a nose and one crocodile-eye, bulging on the surface of a gray-green muddy river.

"That you want a man to love. That you love anyone at all. That you are reconciled to waiting and have hope."

"I've got problems," I said.

"Problems are great," Sonya said. "I look around me, but I don't see anything that interests me. I envy them because they believe in love. They constantly want something, they desire someone. I can't idealize anyone, can't see anyone through rose-colored glasses the way you can. I always see through them right away. I'm suspicious and wary. Can you see what's missing in me?"

"Will they sit there until morning?" I asked.

"They're in love. They don't have to sleep or eat, they have plenty of energy. I'm always exhausted. I go to sleep early and wake up late and feel that I'm withering and dying. Do you understand me at all? They all tell fortunes all night long about men, and mine are always about work. But how am I supposed to work, to create, when I've got no inner span from love to hate, one joy to the next. Why and how? From what source?"

"But we suffer," I insisted.

"I would take it any day," Sonya said and waved a white claw at a taxi. I dropped Sonya off at home and she gave me ten crowns to pay for the cab. In the elevator I saw reflected before me two Queens of Hearts. One facing up, and one facing down—identical, cut in half at the waist. Why is there not one, but two? Why, in the game of Marias, is there a King of Hearts, but no Queen? Is my husband still my King of Hearts, or is it already that other one, who will appear in a few years? The one who is waiting somewhere. I am already afraid.

Translated from the Czech by Andrée Collier

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HAZEL ROWLEY

The Shadow of the White Woman: Richard Wright and the Book-of-the-Month Club

From the time he first put pen to paper, Richard Wright became a signifier for race. No issue is more emotionally charged. What he wrote about, and what Wright himself symbolizes, generates so much passion that it is scarcely possible to see him or his work through the steam. His art has been consistently reduced to statements. The man himself has been stripped of his ambiguity and complexity.

The surviving drafts of Wright's works in the Beinecke Library at Yale, as well as his unpublished manuscripts and correspondence, reveal the almost impossible context in which he was writing. The conflicting forces were such that the Richard Wright we know is a censored, mediated, packaged Richard Wright. Like a ball of wool, there is a complex tangle of threads wound around Wright's work and its reception. It is not easy to disentangle.

Wright passionately believed in the revolutionary potential of writing; his words were going to "tell" and "march" and "fight." Seeing himself as a mediator between cultures, he aimed to "build a bridge of words" between the black and white worlds he inhabited. And yet, in order to commit words to paper at all, Wright had to shut out the clamor of protesting voices inside his head. As Jean-Paul Sartre pointed out in *"Qu'est-ce que la littérature"* (1947), Richard Wright was writing for a "split public," one black, one white, and this gave his every word, his every phrase, an "incomparable tension." Reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's struggle with "the angel in the house," Richard Wright comments in his essay "How 'Bigger' Was Born": "I felt a mental censor. . .standing over me, draped in white, warning me not to write." There were black censors out there too, not just white, and there were real censors, not just those in the head.

Wright wanted to tell the truth, as he saw it, and he wanted to be critical, like any other good writer, but since he was writing about the charged issue of race, these aspirations had repercussions quite outside his control. There was the difficulty of criticizing blacks. In an interview shortly before

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his death in 1960, he told Georges Charbonnier: "You know, we Negro artists are in a rather difficult position. . .I don't want to provide whites with words to strike at black people. This is a moral trap." And there was the difficulty of criticizing whites. He told himself: "I'd be acting out of *fear* if I let what I thought whites would say constrict and paralyze me." The problem he almost certainly underestimated was that his fighting words had to pass muster in what was then the all-white territory of book publishing.

While Wright was absorbed in the process of creating Bigger Thomas, the angriest, most violent anti-hero ever to have appeared in black American literature, he had to fight his anxiety. He wanted to show that stunting and deforming psychosocial conditions have a stunting deforming effect on the individual—*any* individual, white or black. But since Bigger is a black man, Wright worried that whites would see him as the confirmation of all their prejudices. And he could already hear black voices protesting: "But, Mr. Wright, there are so many of us who are *not* like Bigger! Why don't you portray in your fiction the best traits of our race?"

This has been a common response to Wright among black critics. It is hardly surprising. Bigger played into the stereotype of the semi-socialized black man who threatens the established order of white civilization. His very name, Bigger, deliberately evokes racist terminology. On the surface, *Native Son* appears to confirm the very prejudices with which white supremacy propped itself up: here was a black man ready (it seemed) to rape a white woman, kill her and chop her body into pieces to stuff her into a furnace. Here was a brute prepared to pulverize his black girlfriend with a brick, then pitch her body down an airshaft.

In a 1946 article called "It's About Time," Langston Hughes wrote pointedly: "It's about time some Negro writer wrote a good novel about *good* Negroes who do *not* come to a bad end. . . .With all of the millions of colored people in America who never murder anybody, or rape or get raped or want to rape, who never lust after white bodies, or cringe before white stupidity. . .with all the millions of normal human, lovable colored folks in the United States, it is about time some Negro writer put some of them into a book."

Some thirty years later, the African-American writer David Bradley proclaimed that he hated *Native Son* "with a passion." He too was convinced that the novel "was pandering to white expectations." As he put it: "I myself did not want a nut like Bigger Thomas sitting next to me on a bus or in a schoolroom, and certainly I did not want him moving in next door." In Bradley's view, Richard Wright had "sold his people down the river to make a buck."

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In the light of the frequent criticism, particularly among black scholars, that Wright's fiction reinforces white prejudices, it is revealing to know something about the publishing history of Wright's work. The drafts and unpublished manuscripts among Wright's papers at Yale tell a somewhat different story from his published works. In fact, Richard Wright did not write to please white readers any more than he wrote to please black readers. If anything, he rather enjoyed provoking the wrath of both; there was an element in him that liked to shock. Unfortunately for him, it was the white literary establishment that accepted or rejected his manuscripts.

Since *Native Son* and *Black Boy* are the two narratives with which Wright is invariably associated, and since every entry on Richard Wright in directories and anthologies mentions the Book-of-the-Month Club as playing an invaluable part in these spectacular early successes, I will focus on this small aspect of the larger story.

"An interesting development has occurred which promises very exciting possibilities if it comes off. I want to tell you about it, but please don't base any hopes in it yet." It was late August of 1939 when Wright's publisher, Edward Aswell of Harper & Brothers, told Wright that the Book-of-the-Month Club judges were excited about *Native Son*. Aswell had asked Wright to make some revisions to his original manuscript, but the book was now set in galley proofs, ready for publication the following month.

It came as a complete surprise to both Aswell and Wright to be told that the Book-of-the-Month Club liked the book. There was, however, a catch: selection was contingent on Wright making some changes—mostly in the form of excisions. Publication of the novel would have to be postponed.

The enticement of being a Book-of-the-Month selection cannot be underestimated. Wright would be the first black writer to be promoted by the Book-of-the-Month Club. It meant sales of a scope that no black writer had ever enjoyed before, a fat check, and considerable prestige. We know where Wright's publishers and his literary agent stood on the matter. The pressure on Wright was immense. He was thirty-one, it was his first novel, and he wanted as many readers as possible. There is no record of his feelings about the changes; what we do know is that he made them.

The judges hesitated for seven more months, holding up publication. They worried that by selecting this "red-hot poker," they were "risking the utter condemnation of the reading subscribers." Eventually, they declared it one of two Books of the Month for March 1940. (Their other choice was *The Trees*, by Conrad Richter.) But the *Native Son* they were now promoting was no longer quite the same book that had crossed their desk the previous summer. The changes they had asked Wright to make

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appear minor and insignificant, but the overall effect was subtly different. (Only since 1991, when the Library of America published the text that was originally sent to the Book-of-the-Month Club in galley form, have we been able to read the narrative as Wright intended it.)

As Book-of-the-Month for March 1940, *Native Son* appeared to have the best start in life it could possibly hope for. In the first few weeks, it sold faster than any book Harper & Brothers had published in the last twenty years: close to 215,000 copies within three weeks—an astounding figure for a first novel. Renowned playwrights and theatre producers scrambled for the stage rights, and Hollywood put in a bid for the movie rights (with an all-white cast!). With trumpets and heraldry, *Native Son* was hailed as the book of the month, the book of the year, the book of the times. Negative criticism, every bit as passionate as the praise, came later.

Richard Wright's main champion in that period of dazzling triumph seemed to be Dorothy Canfield Fisher. She was a formidable figure. Eleanor Roosevelt considered her one of the ten most influential women in the United States. Robert Frost called her "the great lady of Vermont." A well-known Quaker liberal, Canfield wrote popular novels. She was also a member (a dominant member, by all accounts) of the Book-of-the-Month selection committee.

Canfield Fisher wrote an introduction to the first edition of *Native Son*. She alluded to the Dostoyevskian depths of human experience plumbed by the novel. She added: "I do not at all mean to imply that *Native Son* as literature is comparable to the masterpieces of Dostoevsky."

She declared: "The author shows genuine literary skill." But her starchy introduction made it clear that the value of Wright's novel was as a sociological case study. The situation of Bigger Thomas—and Negro youths generally—was similar, she said, to that of rats in scientific experiments set up to produce psychopathic behavior. "*Native Son* is the first report in fiction we have had from those. . .whose behavior-patterns give evidence of the same bewildered, senseless tangle of abnormal nerve-reactions."

It was unfortunate to reduce a powerful work of fiction to a sociological report. Nevertheless, Canfield Fisher was a worthy name and Wright's publishers thought it "a very good send-off for *Native Son*." Wright himself thanked "Miss Fisher" in a tone that for him was decidedly lukewarm: "I feel that you did present the material in the book in a light that would make it understood by the American reading public." Was there a touch of irony in his phrasing? Generally, writers aspire to communicate with the reading public without mediation. And Canfield Fisher had already done her best to mediate between Wright and the reading public. She would do so again, far more radically, with *Black Boy* in 1945. Canfield Fisher, more

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than any other of the Book-of-the-Month Club judges, took it upon herself to "improve" *Native Son* and *Black Boy*. What this meant, essentially, was to make them into narratives that were less shocking to white readers.

With *Native Son*, the selection committee asked for some deletions. Nothing major. They wanted some of the flab cut out of the speeches in the trial scene, and since this scene was longwinded and highly didactic, this was on the whole a good thing. But the cuts they asked for in the early expository sections had nothing to do with longwindedness.

The question that looms large in the novel is that of Bigger Thomas's guilt. Just how guilty is he? He inadvertently kills a white woman, and he willfully murders his black girlfriend, Bessie. The episode that sets off this train of disasters is a scene between Bigger and Mary—a scene that burns itself into the reader's imagination because it deliberately hovers around the edges of an issue primordial in race mythology: the alleged rape of a white woman by a black man. It is Bigger's terror at being falsely accused of this crime that causes him to silence the white woman by smothering her with a pillow. But what if the shadowy figure of Mrs. Dalton, Mary's mother, had not hovered in the doorway at that point? What if Bigger had kept his hands on Mary's breasts? Would he have raped her?

If Wright was to challenge this racist stereotype rather than reinforce it, it was crucial that his readers understood that Mary Dalton desired her black chauffeur every bit as much as he desired her—if not more so. The build-up of Mary Dalton's somewhat wanton sexuality is every bit as important as the build-up of Bigger as a highly libidinous young man. By modifying what they called Wright's "savage frankness" when it came to sex, the Book-of-the-Month Club judges upset the novel's delicate balance.

It is true that Wright was testing the boundaries of 1930s literary realism in an early scene (some twenty-five years ahead of its time) which was a graphic portrayal of two boys masturbating. No sooner has Bigger seated himself in the darkened movie theatre than he starts "polishing [his] nightstick." His friend Jack races him to orgasm. In the background the pipe organ is playing; otherwise, Wright leaves little to metaphor. It is a credit to Wright's publisher, Ed Aswell, that he was prepared to leave in this scene, though he found it "a bit on the raw side." There was, admittedly, less at stake for him: he was publishing the book, not promoting it, in his own name, to the one hundred thousand members of the Book-of-the-Month Club.

After Canfield Fisher and her colleagues had gone through the manuscript with their editing pencil, the masturbation scene disappeared completely. So did the newsreel that then came on, which to Bigger's surprise, featured Mary Dalton (the daughter of his future employer) and her boyfriend, barelegged and kissing on a gleaming Florida beach. Bigger

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and Jack agreed she was "a hot-looking number" and whispered to each other that some wealthy white women would apparently go to bed with anybody. All this disappeared in the published version.

Arnold Rampersad, who edited the unabridged Library of America edition, comments that "the changes in *Native Son* almost emasculated Bigger Thomas." What he does not point out is that Mary also had her sexual drive dramatically curtailed, and though this involved more delicate snipping—a sentence here and there—the effect on the narrative is more significant. For example, the judges rejected this sentence, when Bigger is with Bessie: "He placed his hands on her breasts just as he had placed them on Mary's last night and he was thinking of that while he kissed her." Was it the sexual explicitness that worried them, or was something else involved?

Under the guise of sexual censorship there was undoubtedly another sort of censorship going on. Arnold Rampersad argues that the Book-of-the-Month Club changes were "the result, not entirely but in part, of racism—racism that was seldom conscious of itself, that was expressed in subtle, even benign ways, but racism nonetheless."

If the judges were uncomfortable with a black man thinking about his hands on a white woman's breasts, they were even less willing to stand behind a book in which the white woman *wants* a black man's hands on her breasts. It was Wright's intention to portray Mary Dalton as somewhat *easy*. Her very name, which we associate with innocence and virginity, was chosen with a playful sense of irony.

Wright was asked to tone down the goings-on in the car when Bigger, now employed as the Dalton family chauffeur, drives Mary Dalton and her Communist boyfriend Jan home from their inebriated excursion to the Chicago blackbelt. In the galley version, Bigger glances in the rear-vision mirror and sees Mary lying flat on her back and Jan bending over her. He sees a "faint sweep of white thigh." Then he hears them both sigh. Realizing what they are up to, he fights off the "stiffening feeling in his loins." In the published version, all that transpires in the back seat is some kissing. Even the word "spooning" was cut. The white woman had been made to sit up and behave. All Bigger now felt was drunk.

Then comes the pivotal scene in which Bigger helps a languorous Mary Dalton up the stairs and into her bedroom. These sentences the judges wanted deleted:

> He tightened his arms as his lips pressed tightly against hers and he felt her body moving strongly. The thought and conviction that Jan had

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> had her a lot flashed through his mind. He kissed her again and felt the sharp bones of her hip move in a hard and veritable grind. Her mouth was open and her breath came slow and deep.

This is a woman who, like her famous fictional predecessor Madame Bovary, has just been carrying on in the back seat of her chauffeured vehicle. She is, we understand, using her drunkenness as a pretext; suddenly she makes movements that are not limp at all. In the same way that Camus, in his novel *L'Étranger* (1942) intended the shafts of sunlight and the glint of the Arab's knife when Meursault kills the Arab, Wright intended every detail of Mary Dalton's thrusts and grinds.

In the censored published version, the white woman's hips have been stilled. She is pure passivity, as limp as a rag doll, scarcely conscious. The whole delicate balance of desire, guilt and responsibility has been altered. Bigger has become the archetypal black beast pawing the sleeping beauty. The white woman, once again, has been completely absolved from responsibility. Seemingly minor changes had made *Native Son* a less provocative, less disturbing novel for white readers.

Four years later, when the galleys of Wright's autobiographical narrative *American Hunger* arrived at the Book-of-the-Month Club, typeset and ready for publication, the selection committee again liked the manuscript. Or so they said. In fact, they liked some of the manuscript. They approved of the first part, called "Southern Night," about Wright's formative years amid Southern racist terror. But the second part of the manuscript (the last third), about Wright's initiation into the white world through communist circles in Chicago, was an indictment of racism in the North. The ending was a passionate call for struggle: "If this country can't find its way to a human path, if it can't inform conduct with a deep sense of life, then all of us, black as well as white, are going down the same drain."

The judges told Wright they would consider the book if he left off the second part. Nor did they approve of the title, *American Hunger*. Their suggestion, thoroughly innocuous, was *First Chapter*. And they wanted Wright to add a few pages to the ending of the first part, "Southern Night," concluding the narrative on a more hopeful note.

The Chicago section served an important function: Richard Wright wanted to show racism in the United States generally, not just the South. His title, *American Hunger*, referred to the physical and spiritual hunger of black people in America. He had no interest in ending his narrative on a false note of resolution. Nevertheless, pressured by his publishers as well by this stage, he consented to ending the book when he left the South.

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(Harper & Brothers assured him they would publish the Chicago section later. In fact, it was not published in book form until 1977, seventeen years after Wright's death.) Wright had great difficulty thinking up another title he liked as much, but eventually he came up with *Black Boy*. Ed Aswell took the precaution of asking the Book-of-the-Month judges whether they approved. Then there was the question of the new ending. Dorothy Canfield Fisher wrote several letters to Wright about this. Couldn't he, she asked him, use the word "hope" to describe what he surely must have felt when he left the South for the North?

Richard Wright, who once made the remark, "I am willing to die for my country, but I refuse to be forced to lie for it," approached truth-telling with missionary zeal. He used the word "hope" in his new ending, but not in the way Canfield Fisher had in mind. "In the main," he wrote, "my hope was merely a kind of self-defense, a conviction that if I did not leave I would perish."

Canfield Fisher asked Wright to explore the question: "What was it that made me conscious of possibilities?" Wright's answer was books. Canfield Fisher insisted: weren't they, at least partly, *American* books? "Could it be," she wrote to him, "that even from inside the prison of injustice, through the barred windows of that Bastille of racial oppression, Richard Wright had caught a glimpse of the American flag?"

She hoped Wright would listen to "an elderly woman writing to a young man" about a "troublingly delicate matter." Too embarrassed to spell out clearly what she wanted from him, she told him that some white Americans "have done what they could to lighten the dark stain of racial discrimination in our nation."

> To receive in the closing pages of your book, one word of recognition for this aspiration, if it were possible for you to give such recognition honestly, would hearten all who believe in American ideals. We would never dream of asking it—we were told by our parents and have told our children never to ask for it.

Wright could not bring himself to express gratitude to white Americans. Nor did he share Dorothy Canfield Fisher's patriotic fervor. He toyed with some sentences and sent the revised ending back to her. She wrote again. "I gather than you cannot bring yourself to use, even once, the word 'American' in speaking of 'the tinge of warmth which came from an unseen light'." She finished: "I'm dictating this letter in rather a hurry, trying to catch the one mail out from our tiny village and may not be saying

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exactly what I mean. But I'm sure that with your sensitive ear you can catch the over-tone. I do hope you also catch the over-tone of my unwillingness to say too much about this."

Canfield Fisher's letter was verging on blackmail. Wright was silent for ten days. When he eventually sent yet another revision to his publisher Edward Aswell, he did not conceal his impatience. "I really feel that this ought to do the thing. I don't think that I could relate myself any better—and keep within the facts—to the American scene."

His silence made Canfield Fisher "very uneasy." Understandably. What if it became known that the Book-of-the-Month Club committee of five was not only directing American readers to certain books (this was controversial enough), but also *modifying* these books to conform to a wholesome American template? She wrote him a hurried note: "I'd never forgive myself if (in my own attempt to be honest) I had stepped beyond the line of permissible influence on a younger writer! Don't you put in a single word which is not from your heart!"

Her letter crossed with Wright's, with his final draft enclosed. For the first time, he used the words "American" and "America"—but not at all as the glowing epithets Canfield Fisher intended. He named some American writers—Dreiser, Masters, Mencken, Anderson, and Lewis—whose critical attitude toward "the straitened American environment" provided him with "a tinge of warmth from an unseen light."

He had taken the risk of infuriating Canfield Fisher. But in fact, she was relieved. "The final version of your ending comes in, to give me the greatest satisfaction," she wrote to Wright. "You have *not* said a word beyond what you really felt and feel—I might have known you'd be incapable of that—the ending is a beautiful piece of writing and deeply full of meaning." In March 1945, the Book-of-the-Month Club made *Black Boy* once again a dual selection, along with Glenway Wescott's wholly forgotten novel *Apartment in Athens*.

Wright had managed, admirably, to keep his integrity—but the fact is, the abridged narrative cushioned white readers from the much more serious challenge of *American Hunger*. Whether or not the removal of the Chicago section was a good idea in aesthetic terms, it distorted the book's message and lessened its punch. The lyrical tone of the new ending was very different from the ferocity and passion of the original ending. Though Wright never actually says so, in the final pages of *Black Boy* the North appears to represent hope and possibility. "With ever-watchful eyes and bearing scars, visible and invisible, I headed North, full of a hazy notion that life could be lived with dignity."

Black Boy has always been seen as a story of triumph: a black man who succeeds, despite all the odds. The narrative's status as autobiography encourages readers to see the gap between the tormented protagonist and the famous author he became as evidence that the American Dream is real.

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This was scarcely the point Wright wanted to make.

Dorothy Canfield Fisher reviewed the book in the February 1945 *Book-of-the-Month Club News*. Richard Wright, she asserted, was "one of the most accomplished and gifted of our younger American authors." It was, she thought, lamentable that Wright felt caution toward *all* whites—many of whom were "trying to open the door of decent opportunity to colored people." In particular, she praised the book's conclusion:

> In the last pages he sweeps his readers out from the concrete and definite, with their crushing weight of literal fact, into a spacious realm of thought, poetry, beauty, and understanding. . . .*He quiets his deeply troubled spirit—ours with his*—by drawing a long breath under the open sky of the universal. [Italics mine.]

The new ending soothed the reader's "deeply troubled spirit." That was the crux of it. Dorothy Canfield Fisher had once again made Richard Wright's narrative more palatable to white readers. The issue remains highly ambivalent. Canfield Fisher adamantly believed that she was helping Richard Wright write a more balanced book. Whether she thought through the implications of this is not clear. Most people would agree with her that the removal of the Chicago section made *Black Boy* a better "work of art." Almost certainly, the abridged version has been more widely read and better appreciated than the complete narrative would have been, with its flatly narrated account of Communist Party machinations in Chicago. Packaged as a Book-of-the-Month Club selection (with a brief introduction, again, by Canfield Fisher), Wright's autobiographical narrative had the stamp of respectability from the literary establishment, along with unprecedented sales for a black writer—twice as many as *Native Son*.

But for these gains, Wright must sometimes have felt he had sold his soul. His message had been softened. His marching, fighting words had been smothered, silenced. Across his two most famous narratives the shadow of a white woman had fallen.

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TERRY TEACHOUT

Dance Chronicle: The Greatest Story Ever Told

A century ago, ballets always told stories; today, they rarely do. This is not to say that most contemporary dance, or even very much of it, is abstract. In dance, abstraction and representation are inseparably confounded by the living presence of the dancer's body. George Balanchine went so far as to question whether any dance involving human beings could be truly abstract, and while that may be putting it too strongly—it's hard to know how else to describe Merce Cunningham's dances, which are both non-narrative and non-referential—it is true that most choreographers, Balanchine included, have preferred the word "plotless," and that most plotless dances contain implicitly narrative elements. Christopher Wheeldon's "Scènes de Ballet," the hit of New York City Ballet's spring season, is set in a rehearsal studio, and contains a scene in which a child gazes into a mirror and imagines herself as a teenager, dancing a pas de deux with a young man. But that is not a plot, merely a situation, and such situations are as close as modern dances typically come to telling stories.

Novice balletgoers, on the other hand, love straightforwardly told stories, and prefer multi-act story ballets to plotless one-act dances, just as book buyers prefer full-length novels to short-story collections. Put on *Swan Lake* or *Giselle* and the theater will magically fill with monied patrons; put on anything else and you'll have to work overtime to sell tickets. This awkward fact of life is known to the artistic directors of every ballet company in the world (hence Balanchine's sardonic quip that all ballets should be named *Swan Lake,* so as to draw a crowd). It explains why *The Nutcracker* has become a Christmastime staple throughout America, and why most companies also go out of their way to mount costly productions of the other nineteenth-century classics.

Alas, no more than a half-dozen full-evening story ballets made in this century have succeeded in establishing themselves at all securely in the international repertory. You'd think audiences would have figured out by now that the best modern ballets are plotless, just as they finally figured out that the best modern art (for a while, anyway) was abstract. But they don't seem to care: given the choice between a bad full-evening ballet and a mixed bill of one-act masterpieces, they will almost always opt for the former.

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This appetite for narrative is by no means contemptible. It is, I think, perfectly natural to assume that a dance will tell *some* kind of story; indeed, it may be that narrative is the "normal" condition of dance, even as Clement Greenberg, the great theorist of abstract art, suspected that representation was the "normal" condition of painting, though he also believed that "the most ambitious and effective pictorial art of these times is abstract or goes in that direction." That last qualifying phrase, as it happens, is of direct relevance here, given the fact that so many key dances of the modern era—Balanchine's "The Four Temperaments," Jerome Robbins's "Dances at a Gathering," Paul Taylor's "Esplanade," Twyla Tharp's "Push Comes to Shove," Pilobolus's "Day Two," Mark Morris's "New Love Song Waltzes"—have been nominally plotless but in no way abstract.

What contemporary choreographers have not been able to produce, at least so far, are full-evening story ballets that are modern in any recognizable sense of the word. Nearly every multi-act ballet made since 1960 has been a pastiche of one kind or another. Some are shamelessly derivative: Ben Stevenson, who runs Houston Ballet, specializes in faux-romantic ballets set to the music of Liszt and Tchaikovsky and crammed full of mock-folk dances and divertissements containing not a single fresh step. Others at least attempt to come to grips with modernity, though never more than half-heartedly. This is almost literally true of Kenneth MacMillan's *Anastasia,* originally made in 1971 and revived this spring by American Ballet Theatre: the first two acts are old-fashioned costume pieces, while the finale, a heavy-breathing psychological ballet set in an insane asylum, is a hopelessly dated multimedia spectacle that has the stale smell of self-parody, with the title character tearing her hair to the quaint sounds of crunch-and-thump electronic music.

Unable to create convincing new full-evening ballets, some choreographers are choosing instead to deconstruct the classics. This approach can sometimes be made to work—*The Hard Nut*, Mark Morris's modern-dance recasting of *The Nutcracker*, is highly effective on its own iconoclastic terms—but more often the results are memorable for reasons that have little or nothing to do with dance per se. Matthew Bourne's "all-male" version of *Swan Lake* (the cast does include women, but they are without exception insipid, crass, or repulsive), in which Tchaikovsky's familiar score is used as underpinning for an up-to-the-second exercise in identity politics du jour, is a case in point. The largely gay Broadway audiences who flocked last winter to *Swan Lake*, which was billed as "more like a musical that happens to be danced," were clearly cheering something other than Bourne's choreography, an ill-centered mishmash of ham-fisted modern dance and dumpy-looking pseudo-ballet.

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The near-total inability of modern choreographers to make successful multi-act ballets suggests that the problem may be one of form as much as substance. Virtually all new full-evening ballets are modeled more or less directly on the nineteenth-century classics, often quite slavishly so. They are three-act period pieces in which the story is periodically interrupted by non-narrative divertissements that give the principal dancers and soloists ample opportunity to show off; the music consists of short, self-contained numbers colorfully orchestrated in the manner of Tchaikovsky.

The assumption seems to be that what was good enough for Petipa and Tchaikovsky ought to be good enough for us. But was it good enough for Petipa and Tchaikovsky themselves? One of the biggest problems facing classical ballet companies is that there are only seven full-evening ballets from the nineteenth century, *La Bayadère*, *Coppélia*, *Don Quixote*, *Giselle*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake* and *La Sylphide*, that continue to be staged regularly in anything remotely resembling their original form. (*The Nutcracker* is almost always seen in modern restagings.) That is a slender legacy on which to build a theatrical tradition—slender enough to leave one wondering whether the tradition was all that impressive in the first place.

George Balanchine certainly had grave doubts about the formal viability of the nineteenth-century story ballet. His purpose in making such one-act dances as "Serenade" and "Ballet Imperial" (both of which, significantly, are set to the music of Tchaikovsky) was to create a new formal context for the movement vocabulary of classical ballet, one that would make possible a more purely poetic mode of expression divorced from the rigid specifics of mime-based narrative. Most of the major choreographers of the past half-century have followed his lead; even Frederick Ashton, though he favored the story ballet, acknowledged the unique power of plotless dances to "leave an audience suspended in a trance-like response (that a story ballet can never achieve) because of their very directness and delicacy of poetic potency that needle-like reaches the heart."

Could it be, then, that modern attempts to make traditional story ballets are doomed to failure because of the intrinsic limitations of the form itself? The Kirov Ballet recently put this question to the test with its new staging of *The Sleeping Beauty*, performed in July at New York's Metropolitan Opera House, in which the company has sought to reproduce as exactly as possible the Mariinsky Theatre's 1890 production. Not only are the sets and costumes based on surviving designs, but Petipa's choreography has been reconstructed according to the notation of Nicholas Sergeyev, the company's regisseur-general, who fled Russia in 1917. Sergeyev's notes have been used on several previous occasions (most notably when Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes danced *The Sleeping Beauty*

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in 1921), but this is the first time any modern company has sought to recreate the original production in its entirety.

The Kirov's *Sleeping Beauty* is as authentic a version as we are likely to see, and though the pace is at times painfully slow (the running time is just under four hours), it is still possible for today's audiences to enter fully into Petipa's now-remote imaginative world. For my part, I found the experience both aesthetically convincing and deeply moving—yet it never occurred to me for a moment to suppose that anyone in his right mind would want to make a modern ballet along the same lines, any more than he would want to write an opera like *Tristan und Isolde,* a novel like *Bleak House,* or a symphony like the Brahms C Minor. As good as, yes, but just like? Such a narrow ambition contrasts sharply with the intentions of the neoclassical modernists (including Igor Stravinsky, Balanchine's mentor), who sought not to imitate but to recreate imaginatively and thereby revitalize the forms of the past. This being the opposite of what most contemporary choreographers who make full-evening ballets are trying to do, it stands to reason that their efforts should have proved so consistently unsuccessful.

Does this mean the story ballet is dead? Not necessarily. Balanchine himself offered an alternative to the nineteenth-century model in his 1962 dance version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, set to the music of Mendelssohn. At first glance, *Midsummer* may look like a pastiche ballet transformed by the hand of genius, but a closer look reveals that Balanchine has radically rethought the conventional story-ballet structure. *Midsummer* is cast in two compact acts, the first of which contains most of Shakespeare's plot; the main narrative sequences are accompanied not by short musical numbers but by three symphonic overtures lasting about ten minutes each, thereby creating a powerful forward momentum. The second-act divertissement (whose pas de deux is in E major, the same key as the first-act overture) is similarly followed by an extended orchestral episode that returns us to the enchanted forest (and the home key of E major), giving the ballet a structural unity too often missing from nineteenth-century ballets, most of which seem to have been thrown together without apparent regard for the niceties of musico-theatrical architecture.

Unlike *The Sleeping Beauty*, which is more like a pageant than a play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a true dance drama. We watch it not to savor individual snippets of choreography—wonderful though they are, especially Oberon's virtuoso variation—but to be swept up in the unfolding action. The result is a sublimely comic poem of reconciliation that is worthy of direct comparison with *The Marriage of Figaro*, though no one ever thinks to make such a comparison; indeed, I get the distinct impression that *Midsummer* is taken for granted by New York balletomanes, who faithfully

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go to see it every spring but rarely stop to reflect on its extreme originality. In fact, it is the most artistically successful full-evening ballet premiered in this century, and to my mind the finest by any choreographer, Petipa included.

That such a miraculous work should have been made by the most celebrated proponent of plotless dance tells us something very important about the complex nature of Balanchine's achievement: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has a plot and characters, while "Serenade" does not, but both are intensely human dramas played out by creatures of flesh and blood. It also suggests the limited extent to which narrowly ideological concepts such as abstraction can be usefully applied to so empirical an art form as ballet. No matter how elusive its narrative thread may be, every ballet tells a story. Our job is to listen.

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KAREN WILKIN

At the Galleries

Every year, the American members of the International Art Critics' Association nominate their favorite shows of the past twelve months, dividing them into "best in a museum," "in a gallery," "by an emerging artist," and so on. (I'm occasionally tempted to suggest "most pretentious," "overrated," "overhyped," or "irritating," and I've often wished there was a slot for "most underrated" or "surprising.") Among the past season's contenders for 1999's "best show in a museum" was *New York Collects: Drawings and Watercolors, 1900-1950,* the Morgan Library's summer blend of familiar and unfamiliar treasures. Memorable from previous museum and gallery exhibits were a textbook 1912 Braque collage and a couple of impeccable Matisses: a fragmented, near-Cubist reclining nude in charcoal from 1938 and a slightly earlier, voluptuous pen and ink of the artist drawing his model. It was a pleasure to see them again, just as it was to re-encounter some of the stellar works from the Thaw Collection—for starters, a pair of ravishing late Cézanne watercolors, an exemplary 1914 Picasso collage, and a nervous 1943 Pollock ink drawing—last seen here several years ago when the Morgan celebrated the Thaws' munificent gift of their superb drawings to the library. Other less well-known but no less pleasurable works ranged from a vigorous Kandinsky brush and ink abstraction to a palpitating Mondrian church facade, from a Marin seascape scribbled in pencil to a crisp Sheeler interior in subtly modulated conté crayon. For charm, it was hard to beat a vivid Bonnard sketch of an interior with a dachshund, while for muscularity, first place went to a richly worked David Smith study for one of his most ambitious sculptures of 1950.

It's a tribute to the wide-ranging, demanding taste of New York collectors that the show presented a reasonably coherent account of modern drawing (in the broadest sense) during the first fifty years of this century in Europe and the U.S., and did so with generally superlative examples. Such standouts as Picasso's vigorous 1907 watercolor study for *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon,* or Braque's staccato 1918 drawing of a fruit dish and newspaper in brown ink and his tiny, seductive 1921 gouache of musical instruments, sheet music, and grapes, were alone almost worth the trip to the Morgan. And more: fine Légers; a wealth of German drawings, including a confrontational Corinth and some tough Beckmanns; works by the

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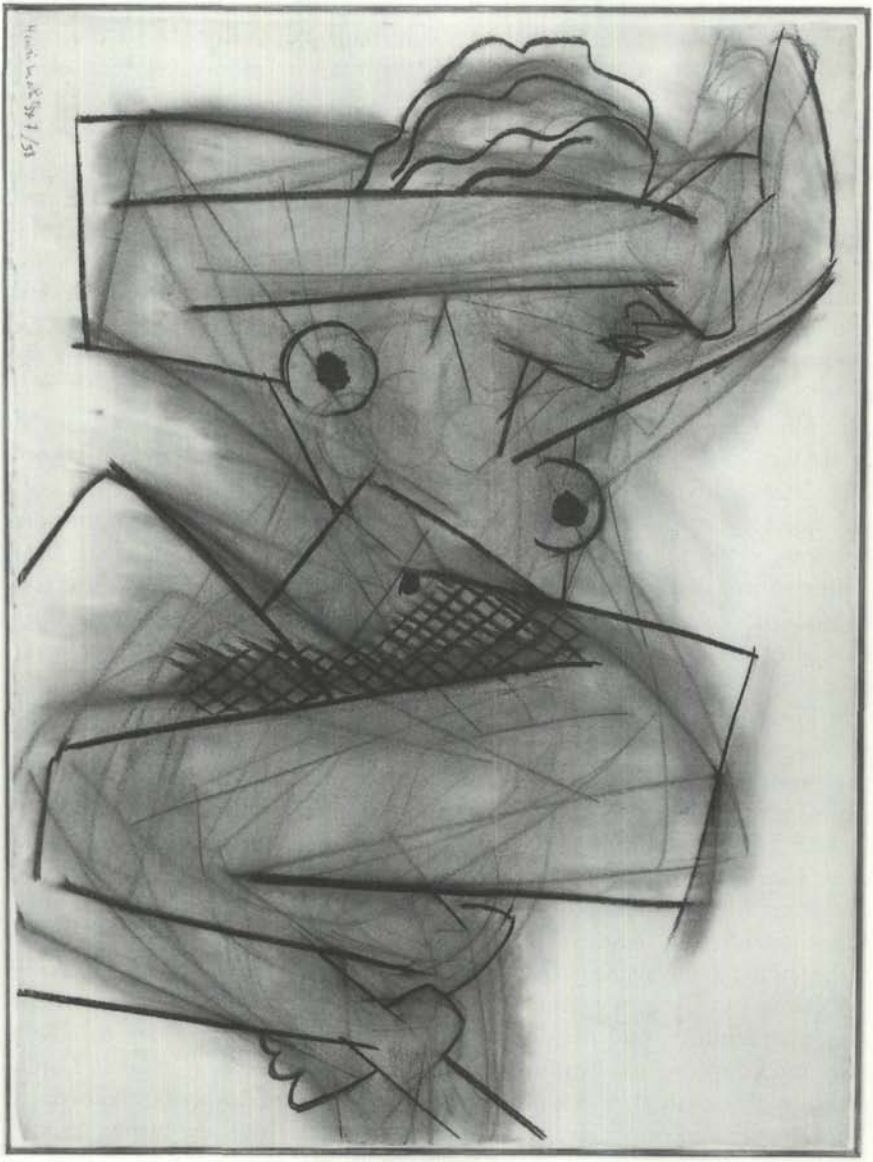

Female Nude (1938) by Henri Matisse. Charcoal, 24 by 31 ⅜ inches. Photography by Schecter Lee, © 1999 Succession H. Matisse, Paris/Artists Rights Society, New York. Courtesy of the Morgan Library.

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Futurists, the Russian Constructivists, and a refreshingly comprehensive selection of Americans. The show even managed to document the evolution of many of the artists included through economical selections of key works or, for a chosen few, mini-retrospectives. A crucial decade of de Kooning's career was spanned by an early Ingres-esque pencil portrait of about 1940, a jagged, Picasso-inspired seated nude of about 1947-1949, and a full-blown 1950 painting on paper of a pneumatic, abstracted female form. Matisse's lifelong accomplishments as a draftsman were also celebrated, beginning with a bold brush and ink still life from 1900 and ending with a glowing cutout paper panel of about 1951, while Picasso, Mondrian, and Klee were similarly well-served. Whether this concentration reflected curatorial preferences or the predilections of New York collectors, the result was impressive.

When lenders revealed their identities, that information sometimes made you look at the work they owned in new ways. Discovering that a lush 1928 Schwitters collage and a jammed 1948 polychrome Kline both belonged to Jasper Johns, for example, made you interrogate them for connections with Johns's efforts—fruitlessly, as it turned out, apart from confirmation that he has a good eye for other artists' work. But it was easy to understand why Helen Frankenthaler, that virtuoso improviser of intuitive abstractions, had acquired a spectacular 1945 Hofmann watercolor, all splatters, delicate touches, and uninhibited, loopy drawing.

The Morgan show was a high point of the summer. Its handsome catalogue, with informative entries for each work and a thoughtful essay on the modern drawing by Jack Flam, is a splendid document of the astonishing resources of this city's collections.

At the other end of the spectrum, a candidate for "most exasperating show" or "show that most consistently provoked irritated comments" (from critics, artists, art historians, aficionados, and casual visitors alike, albeit for different reasons) was the first segment of the Whitney Museum's millennium extravaganza, *The American Century: Art and Culture 1900-2000,* organized by Barbara Haskell, the museum's curator of pre-war art. Part one, a mammoth multi-media survey covering 1900 to 1950, filled the museum all spring and summer. (Part two, covering 1950 to 2000 and organized by three curators, is scheduled for late September through February.) *The American Century* is intended to explore "the evolution of the American identity as seen through the eyes of America's artists over the last century," taking into account "the impact of such forces as immigration, technology and the mass media on art and culture"—which could describe the Whitney's entire mandate. It's an ambitious goal, even for a show of more than twelve hundred paintings, sculptures, and photographs (about the same number of works as the legendary 1913 Armory Show),

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plus what the press release describes, oddly, as "related materials in architecture, decorative arts, music, dance, literature, and film." The result—or at least, the first part of it—was a strangely shapeless, peculiar hodgepodge that clearly strove to cover all possible bases but left glaring and inexplicable gaps in the story it attempted to tell. That this story neither began tidily in 1900 nor changed character decisively in 1950 doesn't help. The Abstract Expressionist generation, for example, most of whose working lives began in the 1930s and continued through the 1960s—or later—were particularly badly served by the show's cut-off dates. (Yes, art politics probably come into it.)

On the plus side, part one included plenty of first-rate works, some iconic and others refreshingly unexpected, from the Whitney's own holdings and collections across the U.S., and assembled them in ways that made for occasionally provocative comparisons. But the overall weighting was, to say the least, curious. Marsden Hartley, for example, figured fairly prominently—as he should—but his near-contemporary, the inventive Cubist-Expressionist, Alfred Maurer, was represented by a single, atypical Fauvist flower painting. Needless to say, there was no shortage of works by the consistently overrated Georgia O'Keeffe. A good number of David Smith's extraordinary early sculptures were included, but so were a good number by his distinctly second-rate colleagues, with no suggestion that they differed in levels of excellence or inventiveness, nor that Smith's 1933 welded metal heads were the first of their kind made in the United States. Architecture was given short shrift, but there was lots of room for sheet music and magazine covers, some installed as a flashy revolving montage.

This being the 1990s, minorities were well represented. Sometimes you could believe that certain works were included just because they were good—Henry Ossawa Tanner's mystical visions, for instance, or William H. Johnson's brash evocations of Harlem, or Jacob Lawrence's deservedly celebrated, economical icons of the history of his fellow African-Americans. But were Edward S. Curtis's and Karl Moon's photographs of Hopi girls with improbable hairdos and seductive Navaho boys included for photographic merits or as token images of Native Americans? This being the 1990s, too, there were ample multi-media inclusions—listening posts, film loops, and video monitors, plus a major "interactive" section—all, it seems, more assiduously studied than anything else; of course, these items were usually bigger and/or noisier than anything else. "Literature" was represented by rather meaningless gatherings of books in vitrines. Dance was a mess. I was happy to see the Fred Astaire film clips—who wouldn't be?—and engaged by the photos of pioneer modern dancers, although a Martha Graham epic on film looked even more stilted and pretentious than I remembered it from performances. But why was equal time

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not accorded Jerome Robbins and George Balanchine? Ignoring them is outrageous on both aesthetic and historical grounds. Robbins's gem, "Fancy Free," the most American of American ballets, premiered in 1944, well within the parameters of the show; Balanchine, who transformed ballet as radically as Matisse or Picasso transformed painting, began to work in the U.S. in the 1930s and founded the New York City Ballet with Lincoln Kirstein in 1948. Balanchine's omission was all the more noticeable because of the attention the show paid to Marcel Duchamp, an immigrant like the Russian-born choreographer, but unlike him, one whose most influential work was done largely in Europe.

The cumulative effect of *The American Century* was a curious leveling out of what Americans accomplished between 1900 and 1950. Little distinction was made between truly original extrapolations from European vanguard models and merely adequate approximations. Generalized section headings, obviously required to make sense of the messiness of actuality, often misled instead of clarifying. Labeling paintings by Stuart Davis and Gerald Murphy as "Consumer Culture" because they take everyday objects as their point of departure—and flanking them with cocktail shakers—distorted the connection of such works to Cubist themes in particular and modernism in general; including under the same heading Charles Demuth's *I Saw the Figure Five in Gold,* inspired by a William Carlos Williams poem, was just plain dumb.

What *The American Century* aspires to is probably impossible to achieve in any exhibition, however vast. The catalogue of part one, *Art and Culture 1900-1950,* while in many ways as exasperating as the show, is far more comprehensive and includes a good deal of useful additional material. I wish I were more optimistic about part two.

I'm not certain what categories of the art critics' poll could encompass a recent quartet of disparate shows by contemporary artists in Chelsea, the Upper East Side and at P.S. 1, but all of them included strong work that merits wider attention. They also affirmed that abstraction is still flourishing.

In Chelsea, Jill Nathanson showed new paintings at Elizabeth Harris. I've admired Nathanson's idiosyncratic, intelligent abstractions for some time, but her recent work struck me as her most ambitious, direct, and complex to date. As always, her pictures are constructed with strange hues that are at once unnameable, full of overtones, and clear—like complex, atonal but seductive chords; they continue her exploration of unexpected color harmonies and dissonances, their contrast strengthened by variations in touch and surface, enriched by a new, unsettling spatial ambiguity. This may sound like conventional (albeit accomplished) color-based abstraction, but it isn't. The declarative surfaces and warped geometry of Nathanson's pictures force a reexamination of assumptions about flat expanse and

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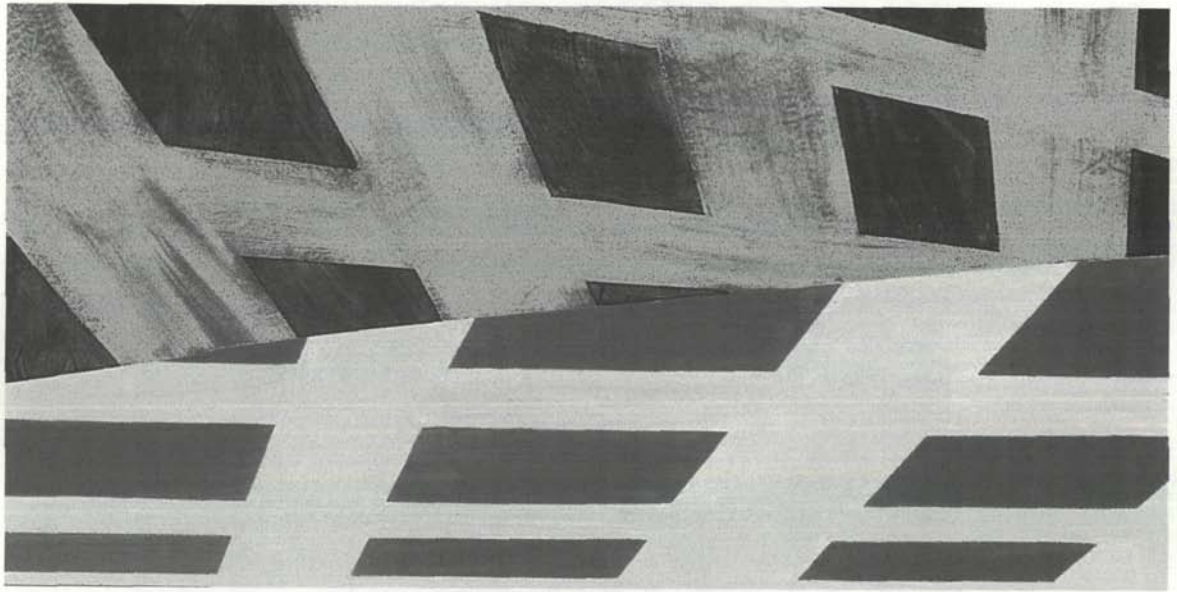

Hold Sway (1999) by Jill Nathanson. Acrylic on canvas, 30 by 59 inches.
Courtesy of Elizabeth Harris Gallery.

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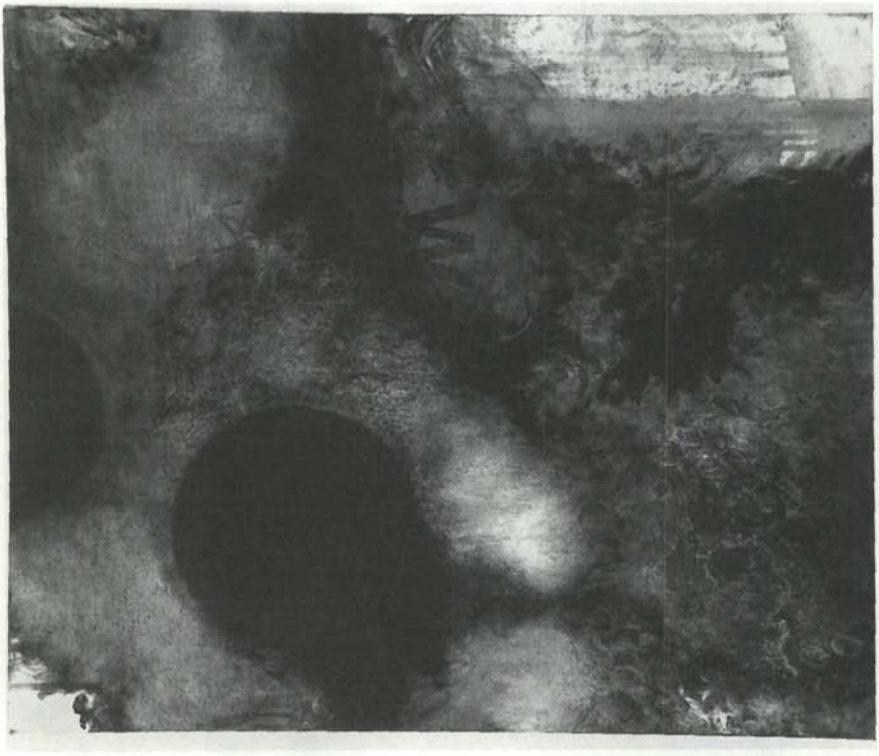

Black Summer's Garden (1999) by Carlos Leon. Oil on canvas, 24 by 20 inches. Courtesy of Kim Foster Gallery.

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perspectival illusion. Images shift in and out of reference, now reading as exuberant patterns, now as fragmented, highly simplified allusions to everyday perceptions. There's something urban and vaguely architectural about these generously scaled canvases, although their quirky colors often suggest—not literally—the natural world. Yet Nathanson seems principally concerned with dissecting the inherited language and conventions of modernist painting itself, which is not to say that her pictures are dispassionate or devoid of feeling. Quite the opposite. For all their up-to-the-minute "cool," they are compelling and emotionally resonant.

Summer group shows are often catch-alls, but *Small Abstractions,* a selection of intimate-scale works by fifteen or so painters and sculptors, chosen by Ann Landi for Chelsea's Kim Foster Gallery, was focused and coherent. Many of the painters were united by their fascination with the physical characteristics of their material. Macyn Bolt's two-panel compositions played with the varied impacts of crusty, dry, slick, plasticky, or rough-hewn paint surfaces, while Lucio Pozzi's little pictures diagrammed the way a range of "hand-made" paint applications—dotting, patting, striping, stroking—could create suggestive layers of color and varying moods. Carlos Leon's mysterious black paintings were among the strongest in the show. Leon, who has a substantial reputation in his native Spain, but has only recently begun to exhibit in New York, is both a thorough-going romantic and a tough-minded explorer of contrasting languages of abstraction, from the gestural to the geometric. His masterly, dreamy little canvases, with their shifting scales, ambiguous spaces, and pulsing atmosphere of subtly inflected, accumulated marks, repaid close attention.

Stan Smokler's witty, exquisitely crafted steel constructions were notable, among the show's sculpture, for their elegance and playfulness. A fragile wall-hung construction in wood by Creighton Michael posed absorbing questions about perception; only an extreme side view promised to reveal the logic of the piece, but the viewer's progress was blocked by the supporting wall. In some ways, the idea was more interesting than the execution, but it made me want to see more.

Uptown, at Salander-O'Reilly, abstractions filled all floors of the gallery. John Griefen's recent paintings were like stilled waves of thick, layered pigment breaking against the confines of the canvas. Some suggested that Griefen managed to extract the engulfing wash of dark and light from the old master painting he admires and translate it into intensely physical, wholly twentieth-century swoops of weirdly colored, translucent acrylic. Others were opaque and crusty—almost brutally about the act of painting. Griefen's pictures are distinguished by their sense of instability, as though these dry, unignorably present objects were forming as we watched and then reforming into elusive metaphors.

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Dan Christensen showed works tracing the gradual transformation of his glowing, disembodied "disc" paintings into jazzy accumulations of rapid scribbles, at once abrasive and beautiful. The show was dominated by confrontational, hard-to-ignore images in which the hovering, centralized "disc" mutated, changed shape and proportions, and entered into complex conversation with a surrounding force-field of brushy, layered color. It was like watching the artist's hand assert itself more and more visibly in an inchoate mass of color, pulling it into momentary resolution—momentary because Christensen's offbeat color sense, which runs to metallic pinks, glittering blues, and acid yellow-greens played against, say, chalky black-greens and ochres, gives his recent paintings a pulse that implies imminent change. The staccato black and white calligraphy of his most recent, most animated picture—the one with the scribbles—suggested that Christensen is increasingly letting his hand show, without sacrificing any of the airiness or the arresting frontality of his earlier work. The best of his pictures are like insistent musical notes, endlessly prolonged.

Kikuo Saito showed a rigorously selected group of "black pictures," both on canvas and on paper. The canvases rang changes on meticulously drawn alphabets stacked against delicate, over-scaled grids, eroding into fluent bleeds and strokes of color or subsiding into an enveloping wash of paint—or were the detached letters solidifying out of the dark, liquid pigment? These enigmatic, poetic pictures read as walls, backdrops, or signboards, implacably frontal, but constantly threatened with dissolution into unintelligible clusters of strokes. Saito's severe works on paper benefitted by being seen as a series, since proximity emphasized their differences. The breadth of moods, spaces, and densities the works on paper evoked—from insistent layers to transparent floods to carefully constructed "rock faces"—was impressive.

At P.S. 1, the enigmatically titled *0044*—the dialing code between Ireland and Britain—surveyed contemporary Irish artists working in London. Whatever their origin or present location, however, most of them seem to employ the same formal and conceptual strategies as their counterparts elsewhere: overscaled photos, anonymous facture, random accumulation, astonishing technical effects, ambiguous texts, and all the rest of it. I can't say I recognized any unifying or distinctive characteristics, which is probably fine with the participants, many of whom expressed dismay at being labeled with a national identity when they were interviewed for the exhibition's catalogue. Most of it was pretty forgettable—with a couple of exceptions, the first a performance during the show's opening by André Stitt, which was outstanding for ineptness and incoherence even by the standards of a discipline not famous for refined stagecraft or rigorous logic.

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Night Dancer-Blue (1997) by Dan Christensen. Acrylic on canvas, 55 by 85 inches. Courtesy of Salander-O'Reilly.

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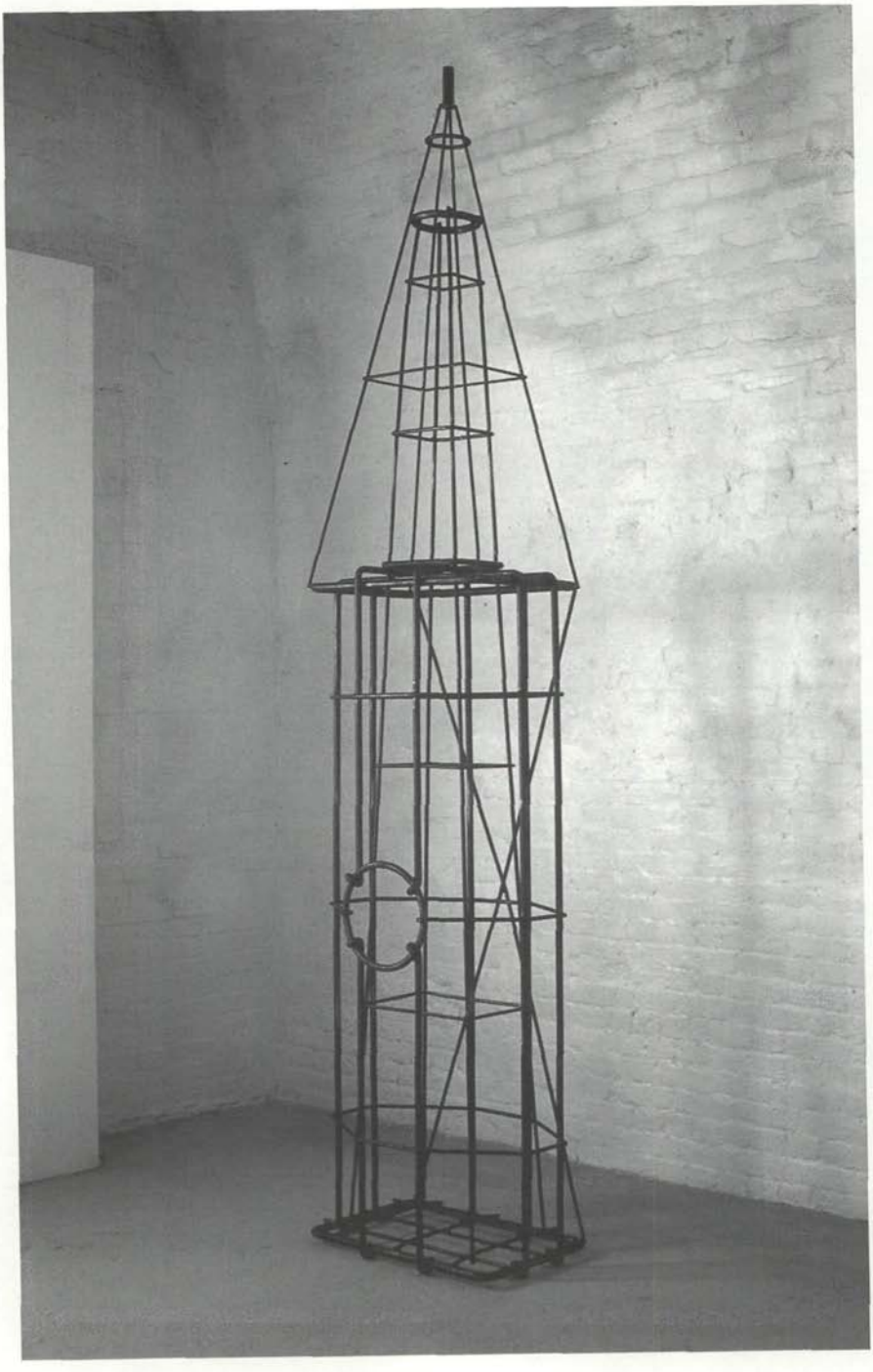

Body and Soul (1996–1999) by John Gibbons. Steel, 344 by 59 by 71 centimeters. Courtesy of P.S. 1.

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The second exception was a group of steel sculptures by John Gibbons, which separated themselves from everything else in the show by their intensity, intelligence, and forthright presence. Gibbons, who is increasingly known in England and Ireland, constructs dense "cages" of steel bars, disturbing structures that declare their connection to the tradition of modernist construction in steel at the same time that they refute many of that tradition's most cherished assumptions; Brancusi and Rodin, as well as David Smith, are among Gibbons's heros. His recent steel sculptures can be penetrated by the eye from every side, but have the unignorable bulk of monoliths. They flirt with allusion, as they do with mass, teasing us with associations that range from the architectural to the funerary to the liturgical, without giving in to any of them. These are powerful, strange, compelling, and notably original works. Gibbons is someone to keep watching.

The most surprising show of the past season was *Kaldis Rediscovered,* a retrospective of paintings from 1941 to 1977 by this Greek-born contemporary of the Abstract Expressionists, seen at Lori Bookstein Fine Art and at the Foundation for Hellenic Culture. Aristodimos Kaldis's vertiginous landscapes, whether small or large, all share an extraordinary sense of space and light, evoked by strategically placed spots and swipes of dazzlingly colored paint. Whether the nominal subject is Kaldis's native Aegean landscape or his adopted America, the effect is identical: a dream-like, abstract vastness punctuated by small incidents—mountain peaks, houses, arcades, ladders, boats, trees—like fragmented recollections. You wander through Kaldis's pictures the way you wander through classical Chinese landscape paintings, losing yourself in thickets of painting events and then reemerging. Innocent and immensely sophisticated, these fresh, energetic pictures have overtones of Ab-Ex gesture, German Expressionism—think early Kandinsky abstraction or Klee, enlarged—and more. For once a "marginalized" artist richly deserves to be absorbed into the canon.

The coolest show of the season—literally—was the Brooklyn Museum's *Impressionists in Winter,* the perfect antidote to the July heatwave. Cynics might call it an excuse to assemble a group of sure-fire crowd pleasers, but this gathering of landscapes by Monet, Renoir, Sisley, et al., while certainly pleasing, also offered revealing comparisons. Limiting the show to winter landscapes and cityscapes—read "snow scenes"—meant that most of the works were based on a similar palette. But what differences! (All this and absorbing questions about the difference between *plein air* and studio paintings, about the translation of perceptions into paint, and more.)

Monet, as usual, separated himself from his colleagues by his faultless sense of tonality—you could sense the temperature, the time of day in his

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pictures. But pictorial imperatives always took precedence over verisimilitude. Throughout his career, snow offered Monet a way of organizing a painting through subtle contrasts and cool harmonies, set off by a surrounding expanse of close-valued hues, but it never stopped him from moving color inventively across the surface of his canvas. A flicker of dull green on one side of an Argenteuil snow scene from 1874 may have had real-life justification, but that is far less important than its role in a complex orchestration of greys, blues, and browns, all woven through by off-whites. Monet never succumbed to the candybox sweetness or the evenhanded monotone (the result of a regular distribution of the same, rather predictable colors across the entire canvas) that afflicted most of his peers when they tried to evoke sunlight or—worse yet—sunset on snow. Even in his most florid "sunset on the ice floes" series, superheated, abrasive hues and ferocious brushstrokes cancel out incipient prettiness.

Impressionists in Winter presented familiar pictures and familiar types of pictures in a fresh context. If anyone still believes that Impressionism is an unedited slice of actuality transferred to canvas, spending time with these closely related but divergent works should have effected a permanent cure.

Footnote: Anyone fortunate enough to be in Beaune this summer would have found a wonderful surprise at the Musée du Vin, the former residence of the Dukes of Burgundy. *Corpus,* a series of recent sculptures by Vincent Barré, was installed in the old kitchen of this splendid Gothic hotel, in the elegant reception room, and in the austere, graveled courtyard. A large wing-like Barré was near the town ramparts, all part of an ongoing program of installing contemporary art in historic locations that, when it succeeds, extracts maximum drama from the dialogue between twentieth-century objects and settings colored (in all senses) by the passage of time.

Barré's tense, evocative, small-scale bronzes and cast iron sculptures, with their subtly inflected surfaces, become especially potent in such locations. His ambiguous forms, at once archaic and timeless, allude both to the organic and the man-made, the ancient and the contemporary; body parts, vessels, mechanical objects, armor, and plant forms compete for precedence in his work. The courtyard sculpture, a trio of large, horizontally disposed hollow forms, demanded to be read in terms of the body at the same time that it made issues of thickness, volume, proportion, and mass imperative. I've followed Barré's work for years, so it was specially exciting to discover that his recent sculptures achieve a new level of expressive physicality.

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ROBERT WEIL

Memories of Iris

Iris Murdoch, the renowned philosopher and beloved novelist, died in Oxford on February 8, 1999 of complications of Alzheimer's disease. Self-effacing and modest despite her genius, she eschewed the praise and publicity which have aggrandized many contemporary writers. Yet this most private of people would have fully approved of the very public way in which her husband, John Bayley, chronicled her inexorable decline in his two memoirs, *Elegy for Iris* and *Iris and her Friends.* In fact, like many characters in her more than two dozen novels, Murdoch would have preferred to go by example, because she had always maintained that moral values could only be communicated through individual trial and personal behavior.

Aware of Iris's philosophy, John Bayley decided in the fall of 1997 to defy conventional sensibilities about illness, and deal with Iris's incapacity strictly on their own terms. Deeply influenced then by the works of Leo Tolstoy, Bayley was bringing his own Tolstoyan drama to life, making Iris's death as visible as that of his literary mentor, who, in 1910, ran away from home at the age of eighty-two, his whereabouts not even known to his wife, Countess Sophia.

Writing in unsparing yet rhapsodic detail about the ravages brought on by Alzheimer's, Bayley, also a most private man, was following Tolstoyan precedent in redefining society's fear of disease and mental illness, echoing the words of Ivan Ilyich, who had "searched for his accustomed fear of death and could not find it." Bayley's dramatic decision not only to come forward with a public announcement of his wife's illness, but also to write joyously and spiritually about his experiences in caring for her reflects his estrangement from a late twentieth-century society where old age is feared and where death has been sanitized by our mainstream culture.

I first met Iris in September of 1994 on a routine publishing trip to London, where I received an unexpected phone call from Natasha and Stephen Spender (whom I had just signed up for what would become his last two books) for what was described as a "simple dinner" with "just a few friends," among them Iris Murdoch and John Bayley, as well as Antonia Fraser and Harold Pinter. Fearing that I would be perceived as a neophyte at best, I tried to allay my anxiety by running out and buying a few Murdoch works that were readily available. I was apprehensive that

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an imperious Dame Iris Murdoch might grill me on the contents of her novels.

Indeed, I was seated next to Iris, and did, in fact, speak with her for over three hours of passionate conversation, but my fear of Murdoch as an intimidating interrogator bore no resemblance to this deeply inquisitive, radiant woman of seventy-five. Dressed modestly and looking like a kindly headmistress of a boarding school, Iris completely beguiled me with the most improbable admixture of wondrous curiosity and barbed wisdom. There was a seductive, yet wholly ineffable, manner to her being that could effortlessly hypnotize and reassure a dinner companion. She wanted to know everything about me, about my upbringing, my favorite writers, and particularly my parents' stories as refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe. It was these accounts culled from my family's past life on the edge—innocent individuals caught in the maelstrom of evil—that fascinated her the most, and she mentioned her own work with Jewish refugees in the 1940s.

I would not see Iris again for another three years, until October of 1997, and by then I already knew from published accounts that her situation had markedly changed for the worse. Having just signed up John's novel *The Red Hat*, I visited the couple at their eccentrically decorated Oxford home, where Alp-like peaks of book piles threatened to collapse at any moment, expecting to pay something of a sympathy call. I assumed that Iris's condition would be politely ignored as John reminisced, perhaps over tea, about the Spenders' memorable dinner party, and discussed the publication plans of his novel. Instead, the scene before me was one that I will never forget. There was Iris transfixed by the television set, intrigued by the trajectory of the golf ball as it swerved its way into the hole. When she addressed me, which was often, she smiled and laughed, occasionally asking questions that were nonsensical as well as repetitious. Although her condition could no longer be hidden, there was a profound joy and merriment that pervaded the Murdoch-Bayley household, an unspoken reaffirmation of the marriage vows through both sickness and health. There was no gloom, no shame, and John was sprightly and ebullient, discussing how he had to make various accommodations over the previous few years. Rather than regarding her as a victim, incapable of sentience or emotional needs, John doted on Iris as if this were their honeymoon, and she his newly won bride. Like Orpheus, he acted as if he could do the impossible, and transport his beloved back from a dark underworld that had robbed her of her sanity. And responding to his melodious words and playful behavior, Iris rarely demonstrated the irritability that frequently complicates Alzheimer's, her abundant smiles always communicating emotions when her words became unintelligible. Following John's example, I engaged Iris on her own cognitive level, with the most basic questions, like

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which dish on the menu she would like to order. And it was that afternoon that the idea of the first memoir was first discussed.

Following my visit, I would call John and Iris as often as two or three times a week from New York. Such calls extended far beyond the discussions of the manuscript-in-progress, for I felt that I was quickly becoming a personal friend and family member. Routinely, we would talk after he and Iris had enjoyed one of John's home-cooked dinners, and virtually no conversation with John ever ended without these seven words: "Would you like a word with Iris?" The first time I thought it was strange to be invited to talk with someone whose thoughts were scattered and frequently incomprehensible, but it wasn't long before I looked forward to these many "chats" with Iris.

"Iris, it's Bob, it's Bob from New York," I would intone loudly.

"Ah," she would exclaim with child-like delight, as if she had become accustomed to my voice on the telephone without comprehending who I really was.

If it were Monday evening, I would perhaps ask her if she had had a good time at their friends' home in Wales.

"Did you have a nice weekend with Peter and Jim?"

"We had a nice weekend, thank you," she would respond, able to key in to specifics of very basic questions, frequently ending any statement with the words, "Thank you."

"Did you have fun with the dog, Cloudy?"

She would pause and then say, "Cloudy, yes," and giggle a bit as if recalling the shaggy dog who would snuggle with her so affectionately.

More frequently, I would merely ask her about the weather, specifically whether it had rained or if it had been hot, as well as about their dinner. "Did you like the spaghetti, did you eat all of your food?" I asked with the apprehension of a parent.

She would pause, as if in deep thought, and more often than not, would reassure me with a chuckle or a "yes I did" that she had cooperated in eating one of John's home-cooked meals.

Occasionally, she corrected me, as in the time she was with John on a vacation in France.

"Did John take good care of you on the trip, is he a good husband?"

"No, John is a perfect angel," she reproved, and after that, I would almost always ask her if John was indeed "a perfect angel."

Particularly, the word "love" elicited a small cry of joy, and she seemed very comforted by the reassurance that her admirers and friends all over the world genuinely loved her.

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The danger in all this attention being paid now to Iris's last few years is that we are inclined to overlook her prodigious output, and only memorialize her for her tragic passage into senility. This would be a horrendous trivialization of a remarkable career, and Iris's essence—her extraordinary struggle to depict the individual battle between good and evil—can be found in such novels as *The Nice and the Good* and *The Red and the Green*, or in her own comments that she provided to other writers. "I believe," she once told the novelist Rachel Billington,"we live in a fantasy world, a world of illusion. And the great task is to find reality." And reviewing Murdoch's *The Good Apprentice* in *The New York Times Book Review*, Harold Bloom noted: "Miss Murdoch's only consistent spirituality is grimly parallel to Freud's, since her novels insist that religious consciousness, in our postreligious era, must begin with the conviction that only death centers life, that death is the only valid representation of a life better than the life-in-death we all suffer daily."

Iris's death, in fact, came suddenly on a Monday afternoon with John at her bedside. Forced by her rapid physical decline to place her only a few weeks before in an Oxford nursing home that specialized in Alzheimer's, John had not anticipated how immediately her death would come, although he had alerted me the night before that Iris was no longer eating. Upon hearing the news from colleagues on February 8, I sifted through old files at home to find the last lucid conversation I had had with Iris last fall. Although generally unable to communicate anymore on the phone, she had surprised me that last occasion with a rare burst of lucidity:

"How are you, Iris?" I had asked.

"You know," she volunteered, "I'm just a strange person."

"You're not strange at all, you're a wonderful person and you give love to everyone."

"Ah, but my head, I'm not real," she responded.

And after a few minutes of familiar patter, we had our parting words:

"I hope you have a good weekend, Iris."

"I'll try."

"You know, everyone loves you, Iris."

"Ah, but you're a wonderful person, I love you."

And a little over three months later Iris was gone. Yet as Tolstoy observed, "Instead of death there was light."

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BOOKS

A Postmodern Bardolator

SHAKESPEARE: THE INVENTION OF THE HUMAN. By Harold Bloom. Yale University Press. $24.50.

There was a time when it was possible to write about Shakespeare as if one were writing about Mont Blanc or the forests of the Amazon; with, as it were, a purely descriptive enthusiasm. This is what Hazlitt and Coleridge did, and A. C. Bradley of *Shakespearean Tragedy.* Shakespeare was a phenomenon of nature, to be explored and wondered over. The wonder went with the almost invisible process of his sanctification, which took place in what was roughly speaking the Romantic era. Before that critics were shorter, and sometimes sharper. Dryden remarked that "the images of nature were still [i.e., always] present to him, and he drew them not laboriously but luckily." That is as potentially barbed as Ben Jonson's wish that of the many lines Shakespeare wrote "would he had blotted a thousand."

Dr. Johnson could be sharp too; but a general blandness reigned until well into the twentieth century. It was replaced by the need for "a line" on Shakespeare, some overall explanation of the way the stuff had been produced, which usually had the effect of cutting the Bard down to size. A reductive school of criticism pointed out the ways in which Shakespearean characters are in fact all stock types, commonplaces of the Elizabethan theater. Recent emphasis has been on the Bard's mere historicity; on gender, class, and economic questions; on the instability of the text; on the prodigious bit of luck, the "great reckoning in a little room," that removed Marlowe from the scene so that Shakespeare no longer stood in another's shadow. Overall was the standard post-modernist attitude: Shakespeare is no more than what you care to make him. And the dumbing-down of high art in our age means an end to the unlimited bardolatry of the Romantic era and the nineteenth century, and the corresponding tendency in those ages for critics to preen themselves on their affinities with Shakespeare's own ineffable inner intelligence.

For as with Falstaff, who is Harold Bloom's premier Shakespearean hero, Shakespeare's immense imputed powers of perception became the opportunity for perception in others. It flourished unchecked among his readers—for in Romantic and post-Romantic times, Shakespeare was *read* rather than played and seen. Bloom, one feels, would rather meditate over the text than spend afternoons among actors and audience at the new Globe. His idea that Shakespeare invented us, as we think we are, could

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only come about through prolonged perusal, Emersonian contemplation. Robust reductive critics, like John Carey at Oxford, have scoffed at Bloom's conviction that Shakespeare created human nature as we know it, observing that Homer, Chaucer, and Dante, to say nothing of Virgil, Ovid, and the Greek playwrights, had a good shot at revealing how much "humanity" there was inside us, once we started to look around.

But in his review of *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* Carey missed the point. Bloom's contention is more subtle than he was prepared to grasp; and while dismissing Bloom as just another old-fashioned blatherskite of the sort that modern Shakespeareans suppose extinct, Carey merely revealed the limitations of a critic who thinks H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett greater writers than Proust and Henry James. The real point about Bloom's critical stance is that he reinstates the novelists who followed Shakespeare—from Richardson and Austen to James and Joyce—as the true heirs and discoverers of Shakespearean understanding. Post-Shakespearean perception is unavoidable by the modern intelligence: unknowingly we read ourselves and our friends through Shakespearean spectacles. Exactly this point was made by Jane Austen in *Mansfield Park,* with a hidden irony which Shakespeare and Falstaff and Hamlet all would have approved. We really don't need to know about Shakespeare, proclaims the egregious young Henry Crawford. "He is in the blood."

Crawford couldn't have said that unless he had been as familiar with the Bard as was any other English lady or gentleman of the time; and Bloom is seeking—a heroic if hopeless exercise—to restore that blood-familiarity to the common reader of today; to endow them, in this respect at least, with the consciousness of an English—English-speaking as it would now be—gentleman of Jane Austen's era. For Bloom tries valiantly to pretend that we today can all still speak the same Shakespearean language, have the same understandings and grounds for discussion, the same sympathies and powers of impression.

Impression above all. Bloom's book has no index, another gentlemanly touch—what did Shakespeare care about indices after all?—but he pays the right tribute to the gentleman who began it all, the eighteenth-century Welsh diplomat Maurice Morgann, who in the intervals of exercising his own intelligence by helping to give those New Englanders their independence, produced a seminal essay on "The Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff," Bloom's greatest Shakespearean hero and in a sense the only begetter of this book.

Morgann's whole point was "Impression." Falstaff is compelled by the play to engage in all this theater business, this "foregrounding," in Bloom's phrase, of dramatic role and function: being a braggart, being a coward, being rejected. But his real dramatic character, pointed out Morgann, is

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much more comprehensive and much more subtle. Like all the rest of us, he pretends—pretends to be a hero, pretends to be a coward. Inside there may be an Iago, a Hamlet, perhaps a Prospero too. Bloom quotes Morgann's decisive sentences:

> If the characters of Shakespeare are thus *whole,* and as it were original, whilst those of almost all other writers are mere imitation, it may be fit. . .to account for their conduct from the *whole* of character, from general principles, from latent motives, and from policies not avowed.

Morgann, still not much known about or re-perused today, is the forerunner of Coleridge and Hazlitt and Kleist, the Romantics and often the novelists of a golden age who fed, consciously or unconsciously, on a "Morgannatic" understanding of Shakespearean character: its divisions and paradoxes no less than its comprehensiveness, its steadfastness in "policies not avowed."

Like those old-fashioned scholars A. C. Bradley and Mark Van Doren, Bloom gives us separate essays on each play, but he ends with a coda: two little studies, first on "The Shakespearean Difference," and then on the dramatic need and process of "Foregrounding." Bloom's premise remains firm and on the whole justified, that from Shakespeare's invention has come "the most accepted mode for representing character and personality in language," and that he "thereby invented the human as we know it"—human sexuality as well. In a splendid phrase Bloom calls Shakespeare "the original psychologist and Freud the belated rhetorician." The "ever-growing inner self," as revealed by Shakespeare, also accounts for his preternatural awareness of bisexuality and its disguises. The obviousness of bisexuality and its "policies not avowed" is accepted openly in the plays—for example in Antonio's love for Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice*—and yet with the "ironic reserve" which drama requires.

As one might expect, Bloom finally comes down on the side of all those wise persons, from Lamb onwards, who know that one should read Shakespeare rather than see him performed. Nor was Lamb the first. It comes as a shock in a way to find Shakespeare's own fellow-actors Heminge and Condell, who edited the First Folio, advising us to "read him therefore, and againe and againe." Homer and Chaucer were written for performance, but they are enriched every day by the fact that we read them. Shakespeare as Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* knew that it is the words that matter, not the play—"for the best in that kind are but shadows and the worst are no worse if imagination do amend them."

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Indeed it not infrequently happens that the requirements of the play are at odds with the importance Morgann attached to our "impression" of the characters, and what they do and seem. In his second coda "A Word at the End on Foregrounding," Bloom writes wisely of this tricky question, which has caused so much dissension among critics and even annoyance among frustrated playgoers. "Why does no one behave other than zanily in *Twelfth Night*, or other than madly in *Measure for Measure*? Why must Shylock be compelled to accept Christian conversion, or Malvolio be so outrageously tormented?" The answer of course is the needs of the play, which Bloom calls its foregrounding. Impression and character are the essential background; theatrical business the sometimes tedious and frequently perverse foreground.

"Impression" gives total freedom to the idea of character. We may feel that the great characters all contain and create each other. Hamlet is his own Falstaff just as he is his own Iago, and vice versa. One of the best or rather worst examples of foregrounding is the plot of *Measure for Measure*, which virtually destroys the intellectual impression made by the play. What helps to confirm the subtlety and importance of Bloom's general diagnosis is the way in which critics who have failed to perceive and to grasp the importance of "impression," as opposed to "foregrounding," have always tried to save the appearances in *Measure for Measure* by pretending that Shakespeare contrives to keep the play as a unified whole when it is clearly nothing of the kind, and when Shakespeare in any case fairly obviously did not care.

Thus Hazlitt spent page after page fulminating at the vanity and hypocrisy of the Duke, who is "more solicitous of his own feelings than of his subjects' welfare." A shrewd and indeed accurate *impression*; but it perversely refuses to recognize that Shakespeare in this play has taken the daring course of presenting his Duke as two people: one vulnerable and vain, "human, all-too-human"; the other sometimes eloquent and indeed awe-inspiring representative of divine grace. The plot cannot persuade us to bring the two together, but our natural empathy with Shakespearean impression cannot stop us trying to do so. The result is a play that is in equal measure exasperating and fascinating.

As part of the leveling techniques of our age, which make it our duty not to discriminate too much between one kind of "art" and another, it is culturally correct to place Shakespeare as first in degree among Elizabethan playwrights, but no different from them in kind. Bloom will have none of that. "Shakespeare is a phenomenon, totally unlike anything else, and the proof of that is the extent to which human nature and idea and speculation have totally absorbed him." Shakespeare had luck of course. The language he wrote in has become world language, just as his own art has

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become world art. But this does not change the truth of Bloom's concluding assertion: "What Shakespeare shared with his era can explain everything about Shakespeare except what made him so different in degree from his fellows that at last it renders him different in kind."

JOHN BAYLEY

Excavating the Roots of Evil

ETHICS AND EXTERMINATION: REFLECTIONS ON NAZI GENOCIDE. By Michael Burleigh. Cambridge University Press. $54.95.

Following the much publicized dispute over Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* and the continuing, seemingly endless flood of books on the Holocaust, some readers may wonder how many more volumes the proper treatment of the Holocaust requires. But it would be a mistake to ignore *Ethics and Extermination,* a powerful and informative volume on a topic that continues to exert morbid fascination for academic specialists and the public alike.

If there is any consensus in our morally relativistic times about the nature of evil, it is to be found in the designation of the Holocaust and the Nazi political system as its most authentic embodiment. In spite of many other "competing" and sometimes quantitatively greater mass murders in this century (as in Stalin's Soviet Union and Mao's China) the Holocaust retains a uniqueness which explains the stream of books examining its every aspect. What compels this attention, I think, is its extraordinarily deliberate nature and efficiency combined with the vision behind it: that a world purged of a particular group of people (perceived as exceptionally evil and poisonous) will be a vastly better one. The Soviet, Chinese, and Cambodian campaigns of mass murder did not possess the same degree of ideological clarity; a wide range of people were killed for a variety of reasons and under different circumstances—many perished due to the living conditions in the camps, not as a result of a policy of extermination. Future studies of communist mass murders may yet throw new light on the degree of premeditation in these outrages.

Michael Burleigh, an English historian, has written before on topics pertaining to modern Germany and the Nazi policy of euthanasia. Particularly welcome for the American reader is his familiarity, demonstrated in this volume, with the large German literature on the Holocaust

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(much of which remains to be translated). Of the nine pieces in the book, I found particularly enlightening the essay on the Soviet-German war, and those on euthanasia and the current debates on the Holocaust.

Several themes in these essays may be identified. The first and most obvious is the human capacity for evil, that perplexing pleasure human beings sometimes take in inflicting pain, suffering, and death on other humans, which is a matter deserving continued attention and quite distinct from the political, social, economic, or structural conditions which make brutalities and mass murders possible. The second topic, largely neglected (at least in this country), is the involvement and responsibility of people who might be considered intellectuals in the planning and execution of the outrages we associate with Nazism. In this regard the euthanasia program is especially noteworthy as it preceded the Holocaust and was part of "the crucial chain of events which led to it." The third theme of great interest, and one probably also unfamiliar to most American readers, is that of the intellectual-philosophical battles fought over the proper interpretation of the Holocaust—in particular, the recent efforts to assimilate it into a world-view in which modernity and capitalism (or capitalist modernity) are the ultimate sources of all evil and wrongdoing.

Regarding the first topic, the evil to be understood seems to have two major components. The first, already alluded to, is the sadistic pleasure reflected in the photographs taken by German soldiers "record[ing] mass executions by hanging or shooting" with dead bodies "laid out as dead game in front of the men who killed them. . . .Judging from the way in which the majority of these pictures were composed, few of the photographers seem to have been registering revulsion or shock. . . .Rather, the photographs reflect a prurient desire to record something that was initially not an everyday sight, while also capturing. . .moments of absolute power over other human beings." Such photos may also be found in the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., featuring the killers smiling broadly into the camera, pictured next to their victims before or after their deaths by shooting.

The second component of the evil here discussed pertains to those who devise and popularize notions of particularly noxious groups of people who must be destroyed. Such individuals have to become prominent and influential before "ordinary" men can be placed into the positions of power and pleasure they may derive from mistreating the designated enemies. Individuals like Hitler and Stalin did not hesitate to explain why means had to be subordinated to ends and why human sacrifices were to be made both in the conduct of war and in the political battles to be fought for a better world, as they saw it. Discussing wartime losses with one of his generals, Hitler told him: "You have been too deeply impressed by the suffering of

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the soldiers. You feel too much pity for them. You should stand back more. Believe me, things appear clearer when examined at longer range." Another general observed of Hitler: "Losses, as far as he was concerned, were merely figures which reduced fighting power." This was an outlook undoubtedly congenial to Stalin's. Burleigh concludes that "whatever temperamental dissimilarities, the two dictators shared. . .a total indifference to casualties or other losses, including in Stalin's case the capture and death of his son Yakov, an event shrugged off and never recalled in conversation."

The comparison and comparability of Hitler and Stalin is of further relevance in light of the tendency of some contemporary Western intellectuals to vehemently deny it: "people who balk at comparisons between Stalin and Hitler seem to have little difference in trotting out. . .analogies between Hitler and Baroness Thatcher." The reluctance to consider Stalin a moral equal of Hitler is significant as part of a more general unwillingness to confront the moral evils of communist systems.

Notwithstanding the uniqueness of the Holocaust, Nazi and communist mass murders shared the prior dehumanization of "the enemy." Soviet propaganda excelled in this during the Purge Trials and the associated hate campaigns, and the same basic principle was also relied upon during World War II. Ilya Ehrenburg, the Soviet writer made famous during the Stalin era, produced some memorable lines on this theme (quoted by Burleigh); for example, "We are fighting not men but automata in human likeness," who "outwardly. . .appear to be men," and whom he also described as "vile monsters, savages." This brings us to the question of the complicity of people who might be regarded as intellectuals and who, like Ehrenburg, assisted in the dehumanization of the enemy. In the preface, Burleigh writes of Albert Brackman (a German historian and archivist who performed various services for the Nazi regime and dedicated some of his works to Hitler): "His case illustrates how, given the 'right' conditions of a totalitarian regime, a sort of unreflective professional amorality can be translated into the capacity to do other people serious harm. The chapter [on Brackman] could be read as a description of an activist academic 'type,' one moreover whose enveloping political rhetoric could nowadays just as easily be ethnic, feminist or socialist."

It is in the chapters on euthanasia that the most clear-cut involvement of highly trained people can be located. They ran a bureaucracy devoted to organizing and preparing the killing of the mentally ill: "a group of economists, agronomists, lawyers and business men with an expanded pool of academics and psychiatrists. . .this odd assortment of highly educated, morally dulled, humanity set about registering and selecting victims, finding asylums to serve as extermination centers. . .and last but not least a staff of people willing and able to commit mass murder."

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Finally, the American reader will learn from this book of the more recent uses to which the Holocaust has been put. Some of these uses can be traced to the political hyperbole and moral indignation associated with the 1960s. In this type of rhetoric, any grievance of any group, however trivial, became "a genocide" or "genocidal," and the transgressions of a Western police force or academic dean might have brought about comparisons with the SS or Gestapo; it also used to be an irresistible temptation in some circles to denounce any political adversary as "fascist" or "Nazi."

Less well known have been the attempts to use the Holocaust as a stick with which to beat Western civilization as a whole, and especially capitalist modernity—an orientation captured in the phrase "the political economy of the final solution" (part of Burleigh's title for Chapter 8). In this perspective, "mass annihilation emerges as a possible. . .extreme practice of bourgeois capitalist society." In another version, Nazism becomes "a last-ditch revolt by those anti-modern dysfunctional groups. . .who felt. . . threatened by modernization." As the author points out, "To argue that the Holocaust is inherent in 'modernity'. . .is to fail to explain why genocide occurs in. . .non-western societies" such as Cambodia or Rwanda.

It is in the darker side of human nature, and especially the familiar capacity to dehumanize groups by identifying them with some evil, in a peculiar combination with a vision of an ideal society purified of such miscreants, where the fundamental requisites of genocidal massacres are to be found.

This well-written and sometimes justifiably polemical volume provides much historical detail, new information, and clarifying theoretical argument regarding the nature and conditions of the Holocaust—all also applicable to other, lesser-known mass murders of this century.

PAUL HOLLANDER

Knowing Matisse

THE UNKNOWN MATISSE: A LIFE OF HENRY MATISSE: THE EARLY YEARS, 1869-1908. By Hilary Spurling. Alfred A. Knopf. $40.00.

Hilary Spurling has made a notable contribution to the scholarship of one of the twentieth century's finest painters, Henri Matisse, in her rigorous and delightful book. Moreover, her account, albeit biography, restores credibility to the traditional methodology of twentieth-century art history.

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And it's no minor accomplishment that *The Unknown Matisse* is accessible to those less versed in the rancorous twists and turns of modern art's development.

Spurling's model could have been John Rewald's landmark, *The History of Impressionism* (1961), which is equally readable. Her intent, by and large realized, is parallel to that of Rewald, who cited in his preface the famous nineteenth-century French historian and sociologist, Fustel de Coulanges:

> History is not an art, it is a pure science. It does not consist in telling a pleasant story or in profound philosophizing. Like all science, it consists in stating the facts, in analyzing them, in drawing them together and in bringing out their connections. The historian's only skill should consist in deducing from the documents all that is in them and adding nothing they do not contain. The best historian is he who remains closest to his texts, who interprets them most fairly, who writes and even thinks only in that direction.

But as art history began to be shaped into a tool for social advocacy, the joy of looking oddly has become a tragic casualty. There is no greater insult to the *oeuvre* of Matisse and his faith in the power of purely visual expression. Thankfully, Spurling's book soothes the slap. In fact, to remain loyal to her object of scrutiny, she seems to follow Matisse's dictum from his crystalline "Notes of a Painter": "Even when [the artist] departs from nature, he must do it with the conviction that it is only to interpret her more fully." Impartial research is a return ticket.

Spurling places Matisse in his rich historical, social and emotional contexts. Less than half the weight of most exhibition catalogues (yet over four hundred pages), the book is replete with eclectic historical illustrations and abundant reproductions of paintings. A map or two wouldn't have hurt. The book begins with Matisse's birth in 1869 and tapers off just after the turn of the century, with Matisse nearly forty years of age. Almost halfway through his life, he was belatedly but firmly established.

The Matisse of 1908 is familiar to us. He had painted his revolutionary, large, figurative pastorals (*Luxe, calme et volupté,* 1904-5, and *Le Bonheur de vivre,* 1905-6), which remain jarringly enigmatic nearly a century later. By 1908, he had come to the attention of an increasingly open-minded clientele and had exhibited abroad. The idiosyncratic Russian collectors Shchukin and Morosov spurred him on; so did such intellectually sharp Americans as the Steins—Leo, Gertrude, Michael and Sarah—and later the

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Cone sisters, Etta and Claribel, whose generosity brought an incomparable collection to Baltimore in the 1920s. Also in 1908, Matisse published his "Notes of a Painter", mention of which allows Spurling to explore the tempestuous intrigues of early journalism: Mécislas Golberg, an eccentric anarchist, philosopher, critic and very early champion of abstraction, held out for its publication even as he was dying from tuberculosis, while the impetuous and ethically shabby Guillaume Apollinaire, who claimed more fame for promoting Matisse than he deserved, thwarted his efforts. Most significantly, by 1908 Matisse had completed a difficult psychological metamorphosis from cautious student to daring artist. The book's final and enduring Matisse is the one who understood the miraculous relationship between color and light and painted pictures whose truth to nature derived from nature's laws, and not from its imitation.

In the book's sea of detail, paintings function as Stations of the Cross, marking events in an exceedingly stressful personal and professional life. It is often surprising and cause for suspense that Matisse could paint at all. Spurling documents, for the first time, the dismal involvement of his in-laws, the Parayres, in "the greatest swindle of the century," the Humbert Affair, which was revealed in 1902. It set off widespread bankruptcy, mass hysteria and countless suicides, sending cold shudders through the entire Republican government of France. Matisse withdrew into protectionist isolation, but whether or not this led to a conservative lull in the work, as Spurling suggests, is a moot point.

In fact, speculation about the inherently private creative process is at best treacherous, and any suggestion of a one-to-one correlation between art and life is a misguiding seduction. Despite the turmoil of daily life, balance and order do triumph in Matisse's mature paintings, which makes the biographer's task seem deceptively easy. That most artists take the real secrets of their motivations to the grave in no way diminishes the importance of their art or its historical background. For the most part, Spurling establishes balance and order between the two.

Unavoidably, an artist of Matisse's stature is the source of tenacious clichés, to which Spurling resorts heavily for structure. Matisse, the northerner of French Flemish origins, found spiritual solace in sensory overload during Mediterranean sojourns. However iconoclastic, he endured the burdens of bourgeois family life—including two wives and three children—with integrity. While enticing, these categories lose luster by the book's end. Still, the reader is rewarded, for example, when she nails the cultural symbolism of warm coats for impoverished students in late nineteenth-century Paris. Matisse sometimes sold his to buy coal or food, while the painter Albert Marquet went without one for three years running; when another painter, Simon Bussy, showed up in fur, he was briefly ostracized

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for cruel flamboyance. In Spurling's descriptions, one can hear the tender farewell from the fourth act of Puccini's *La Bohème,* as the philosopher Colline donates his overcoat, a faithful friend, to aid the consumptive Mimi:

> You never bowed your worn
> back to the rich and mighty.
> In your pockets,
> as in tranquil grottoes,
> passed philosophers and poets.

Spurling presents details with all the care of Merchant/Ivory, and even the most repugnant situations fascinate. For instance, the streets of his birthplace, Bohain, were "slippery with beet pulp in autumn." Corpses fished every morning from the Seine were placed for identification on slabs behind Notre Dame, minutes from Matisse's Paris studio. The shimmering "watermelon reds and saffron yellows" of Moorish Collioure, a favorite locale for painting on the Catalan coast, were punctuated by women bearing the town's chamberpots on their heads to empty them nightly into the sea.

But Spurling builds a larger world beyond just backdrop, especially in detailing Matisse's rapport with textiles. His own ubiquitous collection, in part, supported his belief that art was defined by the decorative, the sensuality of visual data. Having grown up amidst Bohain's numerous hand-operated Jacquard looms, he was sensitized early and followed the ensuing intense mechanization demanded by voracious appetites in Paris for fancy velvets, cashmeres and silks. Matisse's favorite, the *toile de Jouy,* a piece of light and dark blue polished cotton, was more muse than fabric. Its writhing arabesques enjoyed years of resurrection, most dramatically interfering with any semblance of traditional perspective in the domestic scene, *Harmony in Red (La Desserte),* 1908. And, in expressing his distaste for Titian, Veronese and other Venetian painters, Matisse was kind in calling their efforts not art but "superb fabrics, created to satisfy the physical concerns of their wealthy patrons."

To say the least, Matisse led an active social life. In Spurling's book, his crucial interactions with artists and dealers are finally put into context. This reveals that further scrutiny of the interactions between Matisse and colleagues, based on the art itself, would be helpful. The camaraderie and competition inside the art world, then as now, do shed light on some of what feeds creativity. Perhaps most thought-provoking is Matisse's decision never to seek out Cézanne, the artist who became his conscience: he chose to know him exclusively through his art.

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Spurling remains vivid to the finish. Even when, at last, Matisse was accepted by dealers, his career still wasn't smooth. He endured the inconsistent Berthe Weill, and the legendary Ambroise Vollard, who had an enviable inventory of Cézanne, Gauguin, and van Gogh. Moreover, the committed and calculating Vollard could also appear perversely spaced-out. He even had Matisse baby-sit his own exhibition, with instructions to show the work of other artists to prospective buyers! Woe to the artist left at the mercy of a dealer.

In Spurling, however, Matisse has a clear-headed biographer. His work is accessible and magnificent, as anyone lucky to spend time with it quickly ascertains. Originality, as slippery a notion as any, finds effortless definition there. And thanks to Spurling's work, Matisse comes across in 1999 as being more original than ever.

LELDE MUEHLENBACHS

Cities of the Mind

THE CITY IN LITERATURE: AN INTELLECTUAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY. By Richard Lehan. University of California Press. $45.00

Studies on the city in literature seem generally to wander back and forth over the same ground, constrained on one hand by the physical city as a tangle of cultural and social complexities, and on the other by the city as an ambiguous literary image in the canonical works of a number of canonical authors. Lewis Mumford was the Grand Father of this branch of scholarly endeavor, although in *The City in History* and *The Culture of Cities* Mumford used literary cities judiciously from time to time as paradigmatic illustrations of a cultural thesis rather than as load-bearing pillars of his argument. The followers of Mumford have shifted the emphasis, with results that raise more methodological questions than they answer.

Richard Lehan's respectable book follows this well-traveled route. He concentrates for the most part on English and American literature and culture, except for discussions of Balzac and Zola and sketches of the notions of some continental thinkers. This book is an *omnium gatherum*. Containing too much material, it lacks sufficient method and focus: it reads like a succession of encyclopedia entries, a sequence of discrete blocks rather than an unfolding argument.

The author wants to differentiate his study from others by concentrating on "the city in terms of its functions—as a commercial, industrial,

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or postindustrial entity," but he does not provide enough definition and focus for this, and does not have enough space for treatment of this thesis in depth. His capsule discussion of modernism, for instance, is scattershot. Nietzsche's thought gets a paragraph, and there are also summary presentations in compressed blocks of the Enlightenment, capitalism, Marx, naturalism, and other movements as discrete phenomena, interspersed with discussions of individual writers and novels, also in discrete blocks. The author is well-informed and scrupulous, and has read widely and deeply. But these compressed snippets are bound to be unsatisfactory: one either already knows more, or needs to know more, than what is presented here so briefly. Instead of recapitulating and repeating the well-known ideas of Mumford, the author might have used the space to develop his argument. While there are interesting ideas and aperçus throughout this book, it frequently wanders away from the city, as in a discussion—which is, for this book, extensive—of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as part of a consideration of Defoe and London.

The problem with all these studies that follow in Mumford's footsteps is that intertwining the cultural/social/economic city and the city in literature is a problematic enterprise. A work of literature is not in itself a social or sociological text, contemporary theory notwithstanding. The image of the city in a literary work functions as a constituent element within the work, which is a construct of the creative imagination. This city image cannot provide the complex scientific detail that a sociological study demands.

The image of the city in literature is a rebus. To examine "the city in terms of its functions—as a commercial, industrial, or postindustrial entity" (Professor Luhan's is the example at hand, but he is far from alone in this kind of approach) defines a sociological approach for a cultural study, but the literary city is too slender and ambiguous a reed to bear the weight given to it. This book also makes many statements about culture without advancing satisfactory evidence to support them, providing in its stead blocks of capsule information. Like other studies, this one does not—cannot—satisfactorily meld the cultural-sociological and the literary, and ends up uncomfortably in between. From this point of view, this book's difficulty with focus is a necessary consequence of its method.

The categories of intellectual and cultural history are different from the categories of fiction. As other studies of the city in literature besides this one show, there is a fundamental difficulty in trying to bring together in a meaningful way the tangled physical city, the sociocultural analysis of the city, and the city as bodied forth by the writer of fiction. What we need are new ways of conceptualizing the city as a topos in literature.

For writers, the city functions primarily as a setting in which disparate people, classes, and interests can be thrown together and confront each

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other (e.g., Victor Hugo, Dickens), or, alternatively, as a setting in which the isolated *flâneur* can feel himself walled off from society (e.g., Poe, Baudelaire, Dostoyevsky). Phenomenologically-oriented critics such as Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin have adopted this latter perspective of seeing the city in terms of public space as it impinges on the senses of an individual. Other critics, such as Franco Moretti and Richard Sennett, define urban life not as public in this way but as private. For them, the essence of urban life lies in individual lives within the home, the room, not in the social life of the street. This is why, Moretti argues in *Signs Taken for Wonders*, the city appears in novels only as background: "bourgeois culture is fundamentally a culture of private life, which is reluctant to identify and resolve itself entirely in great collective institutions" such as the city and the state. Novelists and poets are not so categorical in either of these directions, happily weaving public and private spaces into a fictional web that, in Balzac and T. S. Eliot, for example, incorporates something of the complexity of urban life as a phenomenon rather than an idea.

The problem inherent in this book's title is one that besets every writer on the topic. Can "the city in literature" be made the subject of "an intellectual and cultural history"?

BURTON PIKE

Go West

NATHANAEL WEST: NOVELS AND OTHER WRITINGS. Edited by Sacvan Bercovitch. Library of America. $35.00.

A couple of years ago, a panel including Harold Bloom, Gary Indiana, Jay Martin, and Sacvan Bercovitch convened at the Union Square Barnes and Noble to pay homage to Nathanael West, a writer who received little respect in his own lifetime, but whose importance in American fiction has been acknowledged with increasing force since the 1950s. The occasion for this rather unlikely combination of literati in an incongruously commercial setting was the Library of America's publication of *Nathanael West: Novels and Other Writings*, edited by Bercovitch, which, in all its glossy splendor, is meant to solidify West's canonical status once and for all. Sitting behind a mass-produced *Moby Dick* tapestry, the four men were united in the common cause that West, like Melville before him, was an unsung American bard, a prophet of incipient American apocalypse well before the coming millennium made it fashionable.

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Bercovitch and Martin merely condescended to their bookstore audience, promoting their man just as the cashiers downstairs were selling Starbucks (can one imagine any company making similar profit from a West character as from Melville's?). West was, according to his editor Bercovitch and his biographer Martin, a man of the people, who dutifully marched in Union Square Socialist rallies and, as they each pointed out, was the first Jew to break the Library of America barrier in a series that had already included nearly a hundred writers (fellow Jew Gertrude Stein subsequently rounded out the number). It was only Harold Bloom, obstreperous as ever, who put a halt to the promotional pitch. West may have cared for the masses, Bloom conceded, but the former Nathan Weinstein not only denied his Jewishness—going so far as to become something of an anti-Semite—but spawned a "rancid" nihilism that ultimately belied any good political intentions. It is hard to attach any belief to a writer whose writings contain a sweeping rejection of political causes, religious faith, artistic redemption, and romantic love. Even though people have learned to like West, many of them can't seem to agree about what he stood for.

The edition creates an ideal occasion to address the question of where we place West, and why he might be more apt for our cultural moment than he was for his own. In addition to the four previously published novels (*The Dream Life of Balso Snell*, *Miss Lonelyhearts*, *A Cool Million*, and *The Day of the Locust*), the new collection includes stories West couldn't publish in his own lifetime, a poem, a play, letters, outlines, screenplays, and a Guggenheim proposal that was rejected despite a recommendation letter from F. Scott Fitzgerald. There are plenty of unheard melodies in the new collection, and among the spurts of brilliance are "Western Union Boy," a tale of a promising college chum gone wrong, and "Burn the Cities," a parodistic political polemic in monotonous verse. But the standout among the unpublished work is "The Adventurer," a burlesque combination of Dostoevsky's Underground Man and Hardy's Jude who roams the reading room of the New York Public Library and Central Park contemplating apocalypse. Although West graduated from Brown the same year as master parodist (and future brother-in-law) S. J. Perelman, his comedic prose seems more prophetic of the self-hating angst of Woody Allen or Philip Roth than the humor writing of his contemporaries. It was Perelman who first showed West letters addressed to an advice columnist under the pseudonym Susan Chester; although Perelman couldn't make comic hay out of it, West—like fellow Jewish agonists Allen and Roth at their best—was able to mine the tragedy for all its comedy, without any loss of power.

Indeed, of all the works, it is *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933) that stands alone as West's unassailable masterpiece. The title character, a writer who takes

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on an advice column as a lark, is overwhelmed by the endless pleas from the "Broken-Hearted, Desperate, Sick of it All" masses that allude ingeniously to the human calamities of the Depression as much as they foretell our moment of talk-show confessionalism. Shrike, his demonic editor, personifies a gleeful version of the nihilism Miss Lonelyhearts impotently rails against but cannot deny. Parodying Miss Lonelyhearts's artistic pretensions, he demolishes Paterian aestheticism in one fell swoop: "Tell them that you know that your shoes are broken and that there are pimples on your face, yes, and that you have buck teeth and a club foot, but that you don't care for to-morrow they are playing Beethoven's last quartets in Carnegie Hall and at home you have Shakespeare's plays in one volume."

West's extreme negativity seems more akin to a slacker sneer than any kind of thirties high-modernist irony. Indeed, many cultural critics, from William Bennett to David Denby, think that Generation X invented their own brand of ironic detachment, as if every generation invents nihilism as much as they think they invent sex. But before there was the balletic violence of Sam Peckinpah, the ethnic violence of Martin Scorsese, or the blasé violence of Quentin Tarantino, West constructed and justified an aesthetic of violence, quite possibly better than anyone else. (In the short manifesto *Some Notes on Violence*, West proclaims, "In America violence is idiomatic.") Yet the novel is more than just blood, guts, and gore. West conceived of the novel as a "moral satire" while also admitting the influence of comic strips. In addition to its cartoonish sex and violence, the novel also transcends its immediate parodic occasion. Even though Shrike demolishes any claims for the redeeming force of art—evoking the warning preceding *Huckleberry Finn*—the novel can stand beside Twain's novel as a masterpiece despite its attempts to undercut itself. Jay Martin's biography gives a detailed account of the arduous three years West spent sweating out the novel, in contrast to West's casual attitude towards his screenplays; if his work habits on *Miss Lonelyhearts* were any indication, West's belief in aesthetic exactitude surpassed Shrike's satire.

Although West's reputation seems to rest almost entirely on the rather perverse pleasures of *Miss Lonelyhearts*, there are powerful passages sprinkled throughout the rest of his *oeuvre*. *A Cool Million* is West's *Candide*, an outrageous Horatio Alger parody that pitilessly chronicles the misfortunes of callow Lemuel Pitkin from rural poverty to urban violence. The multiple rapes of Betty Prail (West always called his heroines Betty) may be gratuitous, but that's the point. The novel is funny in the same way that Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* is funny; you recoil with horror, but find yourself laughing despite your guilt. Its anti-Fascist satire proved that West's reflections weren't entirely of a non-political man, even if he tended merely to make comedic hay out of his rogues' gallery of atrocities (white

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slavery of Asians, pseudo-Nazi rallies, and so on), more than a Michael Gold-style call to political action.

The Day of the Locust, while collapsing under its own weight, still conveys with macabre comedy the society of the spectacle in the booming Hollywood of the 1930s, one of the few operating dream factories during the Great Depression. With its indictment of the shallow Hollywood culture that would come to dominate all of American culture (and, incidentally, would suppress its Jewish origins as West suppressed his own), the novel's influence is evident in any recent send-up of Hollywood, especially Michael Tolkin's (and later Robert Altman's) *The Player* and the Coen Brothers' *Barton Fink*. The riot that closes the novel, it has been observed many times, anticipates both the carnage of Watts and South Central, and the frenzy that would become a part of mass culture. Its feverish prose redeems the shaggy-dog quality of the banal escapades of Tod Hackett and Homer Simpson (a name that would provide a prophecy of another order). The novel reminds us of the ironic relationship between West as serious novelist and West as Hollywood hack. The appropriately named Hackett—a Yale *artiste* turned Hollywood set designer—is, like Miss Lonelyhearts, a recent college grad who has renounced his artistic pretensions to condescend to mass culture. Unlike Hackett, perhaps West aspired to writing films without selling out. Had he lived longer, could he have realized an art that fused his novelistic ambitions and pop-culture sensibilities? (The less said about the sophomoric *Dream Life of Balso Snell*, the better. If Melville scholars must suffer through *Pierre*, then West scholars must make their way through the story which is essentially a pretentious fart joke).

The rest of the volume—with its unpublished stories, unproduced screenplays, failed play, and despondent letters—shows the disadvantage of being ahead of your time. Many contemporary writers, including David Mamet, Tom Stoppard, and Harold Pinter have shown that it is possible to straddle high and low, balancing serious writing careers with lucrative Hollywood screenwriting; since West was finally getting good advances for his screenplays in the last year of his life, he may have combined these two careers himself had he not fatally run a stop sign with his new wife at the age of thirty-seven. The very thing that put people off in the 1930s, his grim fascination with popular culture, is suddenly a boon to him in a cultural moment so simultaneously apocalyptic and comic, veering from Kasczynski to Lewinsky at the speed of a sound bite. There were plenty of near misses that deferred West's fame: if only Liveright hadn't folded just as *Miss Lonelyhearts* had gone into print; if only Hitchcock had produced West's screenplay *Before the Fact*, which he realized too late was actually superior to his eventual production of *Suspicion*, based on the same novel; if only the systems of mass production—the magazine editors, the studio

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heads, the publishing wizards—had realized that a genius was slipping through their fingers. Being posthumously nestled in the covers of a Library of America volume is a nice bit of recognition, but the belated glory is cold comfort indeed.

DAVID YAFFE

Elegy for Uncertain Clarity

ELEGY FOR THE DEPARTURE AND OTHER POEMS. By Zbigniew Herbert. Translated by John and Bogdana Carpenter. The Ecco Press. $24.00.

THE KING OF THE ANTS. By Zbigniew Herbert. Translated by John and Bogdana Carpenter. The Ecco Press. $22.00.

Zbigniew Herbert was unwavering in his life-long protest against all forms of tyranny and oppression, which he countered not with explosive or revolutionary tactics but with simple, irrefutable reason: the laws of a wooden die, the logic of a pebble. A spiritual leader of the anticommunist movement in Poland, for half a century Herbert observed his surroundings with an unclouded eye, sending out reports in the form of poems. The acute precision normally reserved for the realms of biology, geometry, or some other unflinching science became, in Herbert's hands, a tool for investigating the imagination, the soul, suffering; in short, everything inexact. His death last July went practically unnoticed in the English-speaking press, a grim surprise despite his relative obscurity in the West (at least compared to his Polish compatriots Czeslaw Milosz or even post-Nobel Wislawa Szymborska.) Two new books published posthumously—*Elegy for the Departure and Other Poems,* and a book of "mythological essays," *King of the Ants*—are reminders of Herbert's painful absence and make even more unacceptable any further ignorance of one of the greatest Polish poets, if not one of the greatest poets, full-stop, of our century.

The poems in *Elegy for the Departure,* written between 1950 and 1990, have not been collected before in English. From the very beginning, Herbert had little use for commas and colons: without the prompts of punctuation, his language does not have the leisure of ambiguity and is forced into directness. Very often each of Herbert's lines is an intact phrase, and the line break is the only cue for a caesura Herbert needs: "the poet

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shades his eyes / with his feathered hand / he no longer dreams of flight / but of a fall / that draws like lightning / a profile of infinity." In Herbert's world ambiguity is suspect, a condition advantageous to politicians and—at least in Eastern Europe—to their later incarnation as dictators. Although Herbert was an enemy of easy moral imperatives, for him ambiguity inspired more fear than clarity did, no matter how difficult the truth was to bear. Herbert wanted "to remain faithful / to uncertain clarity," an apparent incongruity best resolved by his poems that draw into their fold the unknown and the beauty of chance, but where there is no room for distortion or imprecision.

Herbert's poems translate remarkably well; the English critic A. Alvarez wrote in 1968 that "even in English, [they] seem finer to me than anything currently being written by any English or American poet." His sharp language, lacking in fussy lyricism, and what Milosz has called the poems' "intellectual structure" account, in part, for this facility of translation, further aided by the brilliant work of his longtime translators John and Bogdana Carpenter.

In the poems in *Elegy for the Departure,* as always, Herbert takes comfort in the impartiality of the inanimate. There are poems about a button, a fragment of a Greek vase, a clock, Chinese wallpaper, a fable about a nail. In the world of objects Herbert found a means of writing about loss and suffering without melodrama. The final and title poem of the book, "Elegy for the Departure of Pen Ink and Lamp," is at once a beautiful lament for the lost keepsakes of childhood and, more deeply, a farewell to writing—for Herbert, indistinguishable from life:

> pen with an ancient nib forgive my unfaithfulness
> and you inkwell—there are still so many good thoughts in you
> forgive me kerosene lamp—you are dying in my memory like a
> deserted campsite
>
> I paid for the betrayal
> but I did not know then
> you were leaving forever
>
> and that it will be
> dark

Pen, ink, and the illumination of a small lamp were the tools Herbert used throughout his lifetime to, like Prometheus, "express his disagreement with the world."

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The mythological essays in *King of the Ants,* written between 1980 and 1995, are Herbert's most extended meditations on the classical myths he often returned to in his poetry. A true myth is unfinished, prone to metamorphosis. It evolves as is necessary, for most important to a myth's survival is its relevance to our lives. It is possible that there is, like a pea under a towering stack of mattresses, an ingot of historical truth on which each myth is based. But in order to become a myth it must outgrow this early and unglamorous realism, for a myth is by definition unverifiable. Myths are exempt from the interrogations of historians, defenders of truth that adhere tenaciously to pristine facts. They are, for the most part, uncritically accepted. Of unknown origin, they are authorless despite the fact that they are endlessly rewritten. Herbert is one of the most gifted tailors of the myths of Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Ovid, Virgil, Horace. This is perhaps due to a sense of the humility of the task, or the necessary disregard for the authorities of inflexible morality and governing beliefs, or an acute sense of irony without which myths would slump into fairy tales. In the eleven essays in *King of the Ants* Herbert conjures some of the more obscure mythological beings, displaying characteristic tenderness for minor gods and neglected heroes, those fated to play a supporting role. Herbert has always been attracted to prose poems, and in these essays that are part narrative, part rumination, he invents a new form he calls "apocryphas." Aligning himself with a genre defined by dubious authorship and authority, Herbert, as usual, divorces himself from the ranks of the self-righteous, of heralds and preachers, "the babble of the speaker's platform."

For Herbert, the classical is not something to be placed behind glass like a museum artifact: what makes an idea or story classical (and differentiates it from the simply ancient or arcane) is its continuous use. Herbert's myths aren't timeless; rather, they are marked by time. Heracles lectures Cerberus about the Latin names of plants (who could resist the irony?), photosynthesis, the philosophy of Kant. Ares discovers "an overwhelming predilection for conspiracies, gangs, and terrorist organizations," and drinks a cup of coffee while waiting for the bomb he planted to explode. Herbert is most often attracted to the other side of a well-known story. His interest is in the opinions of witnesses, those who reside in the shadows of famous protagonists. In Herbert's version of the famous ascent from the underworld, Eurydice asks Hermes, while following Orpheus uphill, "Do we have to?" Atlas, the Titan who holds up the world and who has been sentenced to literary obscurity, is brought to our attention by Herbert, who nominates him as a possible "patron of those who are terminally ill, patron of those condemned to life in prison, those who are hungry from birth to death, the humiliated, all those who are deprived of rights, whose only virtue is mute, helpless, and immovable—up to a point—anger." The last

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and title essay, the story of Ajax's efforts to reign over the Myrmidons, is interrupted and abruptly suspended by the arrival of Clio, who "just at this moment. . .enters the holy grove of myth: a big girl, tall, clumsy, strong as a horse, and coarse beyond words—the goddess of usurpers, repeating her worn-out clichés." And so Herbert ends with a warning against the dangers of history, whose sacredness breeds complacency and whose apparently unimpeachable facts are so often used to justify what myths assure us is unjustifiable:"I never believed in the spirit of history / an invented monster with a murderous look / dialectical beast on a leash led by slaughterers." Very little evil goes unpunished in mythology. History, however, is strikingly void of justice.

Let us hope that Herbert, whose recent death seems already to have begun to recede into history, does not slip into the obscurity from which he rescued so many others.

NICOLE KRAUSS

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LETTERS

To the editors:

Professor John Patrick Diggins argues that "pragmatism failed its own test of praxis," decaying into opportunism and expediency (*Partisan Review,* Spring 1999). Because pragmatism accepts "no ideals beyond experience," only "the empirical data of science and society's conventions" count. "Seeing all life as contingent and truth as relative to circumstance, morality [*sic*] would be determined by the practical and the functional."

Diggins offers his opinion as historically based, but "the founding genius of the school," Charles Sanders Peirce, would reject these statements. A realist, Peirce believed in ideals and norms, and valued inquiry so far as it transcended personal experience. To him, truth was not relative to circumstance, but was a function of individuals submitting their contentions to scientific method and peer review.

William James is more susceptible to Diggins's charges, but he, too, would recoil from these characterizations. James never assigned validity to empirical data and social convention alone, but believed that the empirical world was a portion of the cosmos. Although in *Pragmatism* he spoke of expedience, elsewhere he affirmed more metaphysical aspects of belief and objective grounds for truth. Though James's followers embraced the truth-as-expedience formula, it is incorrect to equate the misapplication of a philosophy with failure.

This collapsing of old and new pragmatism is the basic error of the essay. Diggins says Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* "brilliantly demonstrated that truth could no longer be based on coherence to a scheme or correspondence to the real." However, Rorty mentioned James only seven times, in passing, and gave Dewey only slightly more attention. Instead, he revived pragmatism in a vulgar form, and casually cited James and Dewey as historical backing.

This is not to discount Diggins's judgment, but to note a distinction. Pragmatism did not fail its own test of praxis: it was misconstrued and misapplied. If we wish to understand pragmatism, let's stick to the texts and contexts of Peirce, James, and Dewey. If later enthusiasts distorted pragmatism into alibis for opportunism, let's examine their distortions. There is no reason to accuse pragmatism of validating female infanticide, affirming Vince Lombardi as a role model, ignoring fascism and racism, and verging on pornography.

Mark Bauerlein
Emory University

John Patrick Diggins is right when he suggests that pragmatism is a philosophy for adults only. But democracy is also something we have never entrusted to the young. First, a child is taught that ideas have consequences; it is given a metaphysical framework and a horizon of significance (as Charles Taylor might have it). Then, as society enfranchises the child, we endow it with the wisdom that comes along with recognizing that each person makes only a small contribution to the general will, that the only way to choose among different conceptions of the good life is to put the question

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in the public sector for deliberation (even if we will fail at resolution).

Even pragmatists allow themselves to give their children some values that might come off as foundational. As William Galston reminds us, "to achieve the kind of free self-reflection that many liberals prize, it is better to begin by believing something. Rational deliberation among ways of life is far more meaningful if (and I am tempted to say *only* if) the stakes are meaningful, that is, if the deliberator has strong convictions against which competing claims can be weighed." Compare this with Richard Rorty, who argues that we can afford deconstruction only after "conforming to the norms of the discourses going on around us." Spinning first-order narratives must always precede the deconstruction of self.

Diggins is distraught that the pragmatist agenda seems not to *entail* the virtues of liberal democracy. The pragmatist never need be a liberal because liberals care about certain ends, and pragmatism, in Diggins's reading, is just procedural, is just a means that gives no attention to justice. By reminding us (as a good historian should) of the illiberal politics of the daddies of modern pragmatism (i.e., Pierce, James, and Dewey), Diggins accomplishes a feat which isn't to the point. I doubt Rorty would have a hard time agreeing with Diggins that the fathers of pragmatism left much work to be done. We are redescribing pragmatism every day, and liberal *hope* (not just foundations) will be assumed to be a component of philosophical pragmatism soon enough.

The pragmatist never denies worthy ends. She denies the metaphysical point that she might ever achieve some gothic program, some final vocabulary, a final solution. With Diggins, the pragmatist fears the Nazi, takes him seriously. But the pragmatist feels strongly that she can only hope to beat the Nazi at his own game: no retreat to some competing foundation will move those moved by rhetoric. As much as Diggins, the pragmatist wants to have something to say to the Nazi that might help the Nazi convert; she works at the Nazi's words because that's how she imagines changing someone's world.

Ethan J. Leib
Yale University

To the editors:

Walter Laqueur's reading of my *Founding Myths of Israel* (*Partisan Review,* Winter 1999) constitutes a deeply apologetic and distorted version of Labor Zionism, and is a perversion of my argument and the basic issues I raised. His criticism is ridiculous—for instance, when he says that I write about people whom I did not know. This is true; but is this not what historical writing is all about? His comments also tend to be demagogic, as when he translates into current prices and American dollars allowances and special bonuses received by Labor's leaders in the 1920s and 1930s. My book is not about such trivialities. I gathered archival material in order to follow the emergence of the Israeli political bureaucracy—a new class in the sense of Michels and Djilas—and to respond to some basic questions about the founders' visions of social change. For instance, why was the Histadrut, that state in the making, constructed not as a prototype of a socialist society but as a power structure in which inequality was dominant and ideologically accepted from the executive headed by Ben Gurion to the least of its economic enterprises?

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In 1954, for example, tuition fees in secondary schools in Israel were about 20 Israeli pounds. As the average salary was 60 pounds, working people and new immigrants could not afford to send their children to high school. In the 1920s and 1930s the situation was exactly the same. Nevertheless, Ben Gurion and other government members did not hesitate to pay high fees for their own children. I claim that by 1977, the year of Labor's fall from power, Israeli society as a result of an ideological decision lagged far behind countries like France, or Britain under Labour. That is why the Israeli underclass still votes for the Right and sees the "Left" as the hated establishment. In fact, our Left was never social-democratic, but nationalist: the kibbutz never represented more than 6 or 7 percent of the population. Even at the peak of its power in the 1940s, it was an instrument of nation-building rather than the prototype of an alternative society.

I also ask in the Zionist context a general question: is a national movement aiming at a cultural, moral, and political revolution, and whose values are by their very nature of a particularistic character, capable of coexisting with the universal values of socialism? My conclusions are different from apologetic interpretations and are linked to the very nature of our nationalism.

Last but not least, it was not bad leadership but a general agreement to pursue the traditional Zionist policy of *fait accompli* in the occupied territories, based on our historical rights and on the traditional organic nationalist argument, that has caused the catastrophic situation on the West Bank. It was an ideological decision, not a product of political weakness. It took Rabin over twenty-five years after the Six-Day War to realize that a Palestinian national movement existed, and a few years more, from the beginning of the Intifada, to understand that we will not be able to "break the bones" of the Palestinians fighting for their rights of liberty and independence. His assassination cannot change the historical record.

Zeev Sternhell
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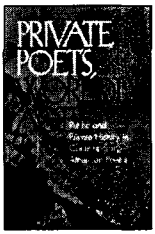

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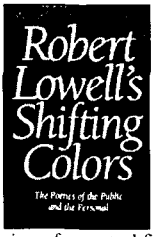

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